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***Perspectives of Identity in Julio Cortázar's Rayuela***

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I, Danny Blackwell, hereby certify that this dissertation, which is 19,334 words in length, has been written by me, that it is a record of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree. All sentences or passages quoted in this dissertation from other people's work (with or without trivial changes) have been placed within quotation marks, and specifically acknowledged by reference to author, work, and page. I understand that plagiarism—the unacknowledged use of such passages—will be considered grounds for failure in this dissertation and, if serious, in the degree program as a whole. I also affirm that, with the exception of the specific acknowledgments, these answers are entirely my own work.

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## Introduction

*Rayuela es una obra en gran medida autoreflexiva, que se pregunta por sí misma a la vez que avanza. La literatura es, pues, uno de sus temas básicos. (...) El interés máximo del texto es que aclara y define tajantemente (por si hiciera falta) cual es el método empleado por Cortázar: "Método: la ironía, la autocrítica incesante, la incongruencia, la imaginación al servicio de nadie"*<sup>1</sup>

My aim was to produce a dissertation, based on *Rayuela*, which focuses on Cortázar's questioning of identity. With this objective in mind, I have studied some of the salient elements in the novel that relate to this topic and the subsequent, interrelated, areas of study that arose in doing so. The cities of Paris and Buenos Aires are placed in contrast within the novel and reflect a dichotomy that reflects Oliveira's condition as a "foreigner," (more specifically as a South American in Europe). This duality is further reflected in Cortázar's use of gender, and the development of the notions of active and passive, and an investigation into the traditional modes of thought, symbols, and stereotypes, and an open-ended questioning of their validity. These topics are framed by a notion of Judeo-Christian History that is in many ways flawed and, as such, contrasts with a more intuitive (or "oriental") perception of reality, which is centred in figures such as la Maga. I found many explicit references to Zen philosophy, and related oriental references, that led me to believe that this area was worthy of further investigation.

*Rayuela* is considered a classic novel within the canon of Spanish language literature. It's famous "tabla," like the rules for a game between the writer and the receptor that produce alternative readings, has led to many discussions regarding the novel's structure and form, and also created a certain amount of polemic with the use of concepts such as the "lector hembra." Many consider Cortázar a greater short story writer than a novelist, but nevertheless this novel had a profound effect on young readers upon its publication, much to Cortázar's surprise, and continues to attract readers, dealing as it does with issues that continue to be relevant to many people. The novel deals in depth with questions relating to modern men and women and their

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<sup>1</sup> Alazraki, Jaime (ed) *Julio Cortázar: La isla final*. New York: Ultramar Editores Primera edición 1983, p.134, and p.140.

position within society, and the relationship with the places they inhabit, notably cities. In *Rayuela* we find the cities portrayed as protagonists, rich in symbolic meaning, and overlapping with each other, and with their citizens in space and time.

It is with the above themes in mind that the structure of my work will focus first on the idea of “place” and the symbolism attached to the cities portrayed in the work, which will further relate to the protagonists and notions of identity. Secondly I will focus more specifically on the dichotomies represented in terms of gender-focused elements: Man/Woman, Active/Passive, *Lector Hembra/Lector Complice*, Horacio/la Maga, and so on. I will take into account some of the criticisms that Cortázar has received and study in depth the differing interpretations of this aspect of the novel.

Finally I will explore elements related to Cortázar’s attempt to contrast occidental and oriental modes of thought (which appears to be interrelated to the aforementioned aspects of male/female for example). The final section will also deal with some the formal aspects of *Rayuela*, and their philosophical implications.

My methodology consists of a close reading of *Rayuela* (and the related texts included in the *Bitacora*<sup>2</sup>), using an analysis that takes into account poststructuralist and postmodernist studies of the novel. All of which will revolve around the main point, which is the deconstruction of identity.

Since I relate Cortázar’s postmodernist conception of identity in relation to place and gender, my analysis will be enlightened by studies about the representation of modern cities in literature as well as by the contribution of gender studies. In addition I will look at the implications of the “Dicotomías occidentales”<sup>3</sup> that Cortázar questions throughout his work, in part through oriental philosophies (the most notable being Zen Buddhism).

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<sup>2</sup> The *Cuaderno de bitácora de Rayuela* consists of the notes that Cortázar made in relation to the novel with comments by Ana María Barrenechea. The so called log-book will be referred to throughout this essay simply as the *Bitacora*.

<sup>3</sup> Cortázar, Julio, *Rayuela*. Madrid: Ediciones Catedra, 2012, p.307. This edition was my main reference point for the novel itself, and from hereon in any reference to *Rayuela* from this edition will simply be referred to as Cortázar, Julio, *Rayuela*.

## 2. PARIS/BAIRES:

### Symbolic cities, and the search for a lost paradise

#### 2.1. Paris es una gran metáfora

*"París, enorme metáfora". ¿Metáfora de qué? Paris queda en disponibilidad para dispararse a un abanico de relaciones trópicas que por el momento no se precisan. Si consideramos la metáfora como un acontecimiento signifiicante, una significación emergente creada por el lenguaje, lo que se ofrece es la inminencia de de ese emerger.<sup>4</sup>*

This section deals with the relationships between identity and space, namely Europe versus America, and more specifically in the modern city, as represented by Paris. Furthermore it delves into the terrain of cities as symbols and metaphors. I will deal with Cortázar's treatment of Paris, and furthermore its relation to Buenos Aires (in wider terms addressing the divide of Europe/Americas: Old world/New world). Cortázar offers an interpretation of Paris, and Europe, from a postcolonial Latin American perspective, and in doing so offers a very personal interpretation of cosmopolitan identity.

Hay en Cortázar una fascinación por las representaciones urbanas y París es el lugar elegido para los recorridos. Esta ciudad que tiene una larguísima tradición en la literatura (y obviamente en la historia) de Francia, es afín a la experiencia estética que la novela propone mientras Buenos Aires es menos una topología que un habla, es una entonación y una experiencia de comunidad urbana, no están en los exteriores sino los interiores.<sup>5</sup>

Paris has long since been one of the key cities referenced within literature. Baudelaire helped to establish Paris as the literary city par excellence. Furthermore it has been an important place for artists from the Americas, in search of their identity, and perhaps their paradise (reflecting the original European conquerors' desire for the same). The Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío stated: 'Yo soñaba con París desde niño, a punto de que cuando hacía mis oraciones rogaba a Dios que no me dejase morir sin

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<sup>4</sup> Julio Cortázar and Ana Maria Barrenechea, *Cuaderno de bitácora de Rayuela*, p.83.

<sup>5</sup> Montaldo, Graciela, 'Contextos de producción', Cortázar, Julio *Rayuela: edición crítica* (Julio Ortega, Saúl Yurkievich, coordinators. Spain: Colección Archivos, 1991), p.584

conocer París. París era para mí como un paraíso en donde se respirase la esencia de la felicidad sobre la tierra.”<sup>6</sup> In respect to the more gender-focussed aspects of this dissertation, it may be worth regarding Kristeva’s assertion that “the first foreigners to emerge at the dawn of our civilization are foreign women—the Danaïdes.”<sup>7</sup> In relation to the idea of woman as foreign, we could include the perception of women in regards to city versus nature, and the symbolism of bridges and water in relation to women and men.<sup>8</sup>

Let us begin, then, with Cortázar’s relation to Paris. Julio Cortázar, once a professor specializing in French literature, moved to Paris with the help of a scholarship when he was 37 years old, in what may appear to have been a kind of spiritual/intellectual pilgrimage.<sup>9</sup> In regards to his self-exile, he once stated:

Me ahogaba dentro de un peronismo que era incapaz de comprender en 1951, cuando un autoparlante en la esquina de mi casa me impedía escuchar los cuartetos de Bela Bartok; hoy (en Francia) puedo muy bien escuchar a Bartok (y lo hago) sin que un autoparlante con *slogans* políticos me parezca un atentado al individuo<sup>10</sup>

Paris, Cortázar’s adopted home, is a key feature in *Rayuela*. Another one of the central themes of the novel, and his oeuvre in general, is the relation we have with the Other (*lo Otro*), and in fact we can see the use of Paris in relation to this theme of the Other.<sup>11</sup> Another fundamental theme, which is tied to the search for the Other, is the division between masculine and feminine. In the novel we see how the women (being as they are representations of “femininity”: the mother, the earth, chaos etc.) offer the protagonist (a character who is trapped both by logic, and by the very city itself) the possibility of recuperating the paradise lost.

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<sup>6</sup> Beardsell, Peter *Europe and Latin America: Returning the Gaze*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000, p.136.

<sup>7</sup> Moi, Toril (ed) *The Kristeva Reader*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1987, p.42.

<sup>8</sup> “In this context of reconciliation of culture and nature, the bridge has an added significance; it is after all, a tangible symbol of connection.” Thüsen, Joachim von der, ‘*The City as Metaphor, Metonym and Symbol*.’ Tinkler-Villani, Valerica (ed), *Babylon Or New Jerusalem? Perceptions of the city in Literature*, New York: Amsterdam-New York, 2005. p.4.

<sup>9</sup> Cities like Paris: “should be considered not only as an objective thing, but also as a practice.”<sup>9</sup>

Tygstrup, Frederik ‘*The Kiterkay City: between system and sensation*.’ Tinkler-Villani, Valerica (ed), *Babylon Or New Jerusalem?* p.230.

<sup>10</sup> Montaldo, Graciela, ‘*Contextos de producción*’, p. 585 n.

<sup>11</sup> “At least two very important elements in the Paris section of *Rayuela* correspond to the models of the more intentional contact with ‘the other’, *lo otro*: the first is the exposure to la Maga (...) the second, the concert given by Berthe Trepát and its sequence, analogous in effect to those of the stories, but possessing greater ‘human vibration’; the third is the death of Rocamadour.” Boldy, Steven *The novels of Julio Cortázar*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980, p.42.

There is no doubt that the “human project” of living in large urban areas obliges us to question how we are to construct places within which we can cohabit, both in practical terms (such as construction and architecture) and in more metaphysical terms, and we must therefore analyse the symbols and myths that support (or not) the cities in which we live together. The novel contains architectural elements such as Paris’s river, its streets, bridges, and cafés, and at the same time it shows us a more subjective Paris, in a state of inertia that reflects the existential doubts of Oliveira, the novel’s protagonist. Cortázar’s literary use of Europe can be read as a “metaphor in the individual’s quest for an elusive or non-existent goal.”<sup>12</sup> In this regard, the cities of the novel become places that are strongly linked to identity. It is common so speak of cities as places of conflict.<sup>13</sup> Cortázar, in an early work, speaks of man’s “...esperanza de superar su soledad y construir con órdenes humanos—a veces demasiados humanos—una sociedad, una ciudad del sol que concilie la libertad con la comunidad.”<sup>14</sup>

Cities, in their attempt to resolve (or mediate) conflict have to be heterogeneous places, within which coexist differing lifestyles, ideologies, and so on. “La irrisoria comedia de los saludos, el “perdón” al cruzarse en la escalera, el asiento que se cede a las señoras en el metro, la confraternidad en la política y los deportes.”<sup>15</sup>

We could read the city’s multiplicity as the driving force that leads writers like Cortázar to incorporate a variety of literary techniques, in order to encapsulate the subjective experience of the modern urban individual:

discontinuity, accelerated velocity, de-individualisation, chance and abrupt collisions, complex interactions between different and juxtaposed discursive and physical systems, and so on, serve as guidelines for the formal organisation of the narrative.<sup>16</sup>

If we accept that modern cities aim to reach a certain kind of totality, in their desire to cover all the required needs (and resolve the conflicts of) its inhabitants, then we may posit that the novels that deal with them should also attempt to be as “total” as

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<sup>12</sup> Beardsell, Peter *Europe and Latin America*, p.203.

<sup>13</sup> To cite Engels: “The brutal indifference, the unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest becomes the more repellent and offensive, the more these individuals are crowded together, within a limited space.” Thüsen, Joachim von der ‘*The City as Metaphor, Metonym and Symbol.*’ p.4.

<sup>14</sup> Cortázar, Julio *Obra Crítica I*, Buenos Aires: Alfaguara, 2011, p.42.

<sup>15</sup> Julio Cortázar, *Rayuela*, p.239.

<sup>16</sup> Tygstrup, Frederik ‘*The Kiterkay City*’ p.228-229



possible, so that there may exist a variety of readings for a variety of readers—something which Cortázar no doubt attempted to do with *Rayuela*.

If Paris is a space, like many, within which one may meander and lose oneself, it is hardly surprising, then, that the novel itself offers differing routes that one can choose, often in order to arrive eventually at the same locations. In other words, the readers can read the chapters of the novel in differing orders, according (or not) to the author's suggested directions and thus lose, and perhaps find, themselves. What is interesting in this process, fostered by Cortázar's unique narrative techniques, is the way in which the same material is affected by different contexts created through divergent chronologies and intertextual reinterpretations. In fact, the two main protagonists of the novel, Oliveira and la Maga, offer us the symbolic image of the "chance encounters" that the reader experiences, and we could go so far as to say that the reader has the option of meandering through the novel in order to discover different readings in the same way that la Maga and Oliveira wander through continually different Parises (be it through the changing nature of the city, be it through the changing natures of the characters, or be it through the fundamental differences in their subjective experiences).

The necessity of living together often leads to a rejection of what is deemed as "common". Speaking of the surrealist movement which he strongly supported, Cortázar writes:

Se advierte en ellos una creciente liberación de todo compromiso común—con la comunidad—y un avance hacia la posesión solitaria de una realidad que no se da en compañía; la magia verbal, el conjuro de la potencias de la analogía, aíslan y distancian a estos escritores que iniciaron su obra dentro de la ciudad del hombre.<sup>17</sup>

This notion of the inherent isolation from which we seek communion is present in Oliveira's consternation at visiting Morelli in hospital after the accident he suffers, an accident that in turn provoked a fleeting sense of community among the passersby and witnesses. Oliveira says, when debating whether to visit him or not: "*Pero a lo mejor le arruino la isla desierta, me convierto en la huella de pie en la arena.*" (It may also be pertinent to recall that Cortázar, while working as a translator, translated Robinson

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<sup>17</sup>Cortázar, *Obra Crítica I*, p.93 (In the footnotes Cortázar alludes to the fact that these artists have adopted a role that has been key within their communities, being as they are "poetas" who perpetuate "en el orden espiritual la actitud mágica del primitivo.")

Crusoe into Spanish.) The protagonist of *Rayuela* is very much like the kind of individual that Cortázar makes reference to when he speaks of “los individuos aislados enfrentando un destino, una realización o una frustración solitaria”.<sup>18</sup> And the theme of the isolated (metaphorically shipwrecked) individual becomes even more emblematic when this kind of person is completely surrounded by other individuals (be it in his club, or among other citizens, or the *clochards*, or—in this case—passers by that jam the streets as they witness a car accident)—the individual who is “aislado,” yet surrounded, and who tries desperately to find some sort of *communion* with his cohabitants. Although Cortázar would go on to be heavily involved in politics, notably allying himself with the Cuban revolution in 1962, we find that “hay una tensión no resuelta entre las dos búsquedas—individual y colectiva—pero *Rayuela* hace su apuesta a la primera.”<sup>19</sup>

We can witness the scene of Morelli’s accident as one of the moments in the novel where we can analyse, most explicitly, the theme of *convivencia*.

Las opiniones eran que el viejo se había resbalado, que el auto había “quemado” la luz roja, que el viejo había querido suicidarse, que todo estaba cada vez peor en París, que el tráfico era monstruoso, que el viejo no tenía la culpa, que el viejo tenía la culpa, que los frenos del auto no andaban bien (...) que en París había demasiados extranjeros que no entendían las leyes del tráfico y les quitaban el trabajo a los franceses.<sup>20</sup>

Oliveira’s search reflects what Cortázar wrote in his Theory of the Tunnel:

La acción se manifiesta entonces simultáneamente en autorrealización y búsqueda de contacto para instituir la comunidad. ¿Pero no bifurcamos una misma senda? La acción existencialista determinaría sentimiento de comunidad en el acto mismo de autorevelar al individuo en la experiencia.<sup>21</sup>

It is important to underline the importance of Oliveira’s condition as a foreigner, a person who doesn’t *belong* and who has an identity belonging to another place that serves as a point of reference from which Paris is interpreted.

In a section of his book *The novels of Julio Cortázar*, entitled “*Buenos Aires and*

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<sup>18</sup> Cortázar, *Obra Crítica I* p.95.

<sup>19</sup> Montaldo, Graciela, ‘*Contextos de producción*’ p.585 n.

<sup>20</sup> Julio Cortázar, *Rayuela*, p.236. It is also worth bearing in mind that Morelli has his accident after slipping on dog excrement, which relates to the scatological elements I have mentioned elsewhere in my study.

<sup>21</sup> Cortázar, *Obra crítica I* p.101.

*Paris in Rayuela*,” Boldy discusses traits associated as typically “Argentinian,” and more specifically “*Porteño*” (an appellative for habitants of Buenos Aires), stating that *Porteños* are afraid of being “taken for a ride” and that, “Oliveira’s stagnation and inactivity in Paris springs from (...) ‘the exercise of an intelligence more intent on not letting itself be taken in than on grasping the truth’”.<sup>22</sup>

In addition to the theme of exile in the work (be it exile from the garden of Eden of exile from Paris/Buenos Aires), we could add the theme of invasion.<sup>23</sup> An interesting case is made in Boldy’s work regarding the theme of invasion, related to Cortázar’s self-exile and estrangement from Argentina and its politics:

Paris then, rather than being escape from rape and invasion, represents (...) the possibility of discovering the ambiguous, monstrous forces (...) Rather than a geographical site, it is a literary construct and an attitude, a bracketing off of the escamoteo, repression, ignoring and forgetting, involved in the attitude represented by Buenos Aires.<sup>24</sup>

## 2.2 BUENOS AIRES: *EL LADO DE ACÁ*

*Oliveira comes to realize that his experiences in Paris are not a closed episode. In a sense, he is still there (...) His behaviour in Buenos Aires is not totally willed, he is ‘a sort of messenger’ (...) of a message of which he himself is unaware. This lack of consciousness is a large step forward and indicates the disappearance of the dualism which had distinguished him from la Maga (...) Analogously, he no longer consciously searches for harmony; the search happens through him or, more radically, he is the search*<sup>25</sup>

Oliveira, having completed an important part of his “initiation” in Paris, returns to Buenos Aires. The symbolism of place and identity—and the metaphor of the metaphysical quest—continues in this second section of the novel: *el lado de acá*. According to Davies: “To be in Europe is to be in exile, in a figurative sense, from one’s true home in the divine. Argentina then represents the divine world”.<sup>26</sup> The Parisian routing of *café con leche*, then, is in the second part of the novel usurped by the “mystical taking of *mate*.”<sup>27</sup> Regarding the novel as read chronologically from

<sup>22</sup> Boldy, Steven *The novels of Julio Cortázar* p.49.

<sup>23</sup> The theme of invasion is fundamental to many interpretations of *La casa tomada*, one of Cortázar’s most well-known, and enigmatic, short stories.

<sup>24</sup> Boldy, Steven *The novels of Julio Cortázar* pp. 40-41.

<sup>25</sup> Boldy, Steven *The novels of Julio Cortázar* p.82.

<sup>26</sup> Davies, Gareth A. ‘Mondrian, Abstract Art, and Theosophy in Julio Cortázar’s *Rayuela*’ (Leeds: philosophical and literary society, University of Leeds Philosophical Society, 1976), p.138.

<sup>27</sup> Davies, Gareth A. ‘Mondrian, Abstract Art, and Theosophy in Julio Cortázar’s *Rayuela*’, p.139. (The whole of the sentence containing this quote is more or less a paraphrase of Davies.)

chapter 1 until chapter 56, Milagros Ezquerro makes the following comments:

Se puede observar que esta primera versión de *Rayuela* viene dividida en dos partes respectivamente tituladas ‘Del lado de allá’ y ‘Del lado de acá’. Así se instaura una partición binaria fundada en el espacio: dos lugares distintos se definen como teatros respectivos de las dos partes de la novela. Estos dos lugares vienen expresados por los dos deícticos en –á del sistema española: *acá* designa el campo donde se incluye el Yo, mientras que *allá* designa el campo de donde se excluye el Yo. La binaridad instiuida por la organización narrativa parece pues ser una opozición (...) la ciudad de Buenos Aires aparece como un espacio sin identidad, donde los personajes se desplazan poco, y siempre de manera imprecisa. Los lugares citados con más frecuencia son lugares cerrados: la habitación de Oliveira, el departamento de traveler, el manicomio.<sup>28</sup>

Ezquerro further adds that the first part is set during the cold part of the year, while the second part is set during summer. She then goes on to suggest that, as France and Argentina are on opposite hemispheres, the French winter and Argentinean summer are simultaneous:

Gracias a este subterfugio, la estructura cronológica de la novela declara que las dos partes se desarrollan al mismo tiempo. Esta particularidad, imperceptible a primera lectura, pone en tela de juicio la noción de tiempo como proceso irreversible de acontecimientos. El antes y el despues, y, por ende, toda noción de causa y de consecuencia se hallan cuestionados: el pasado no condiciona necesariamente el presente, y el regreso no es la consecuencia lógica del exilio. (...) Esta serie de incompatibilidades pone de manifiesto el cuestionamiento de lo que un personaje llama las ‘categorías kantianas’: espacio, tiempo, causalidad, no cotradicción, principio de identidad.<sup>29</sup>

Oliveira, upon his return to Buenos Aires joins his *estranged* friend Traveler and Traveler’s partner Talita. The Travelers, despite their eccentricities, represent a kind of stability, belonging firmly to a notion of “territory.” Talita is a double of la Maga and has some of the more intuitive qualities of that character, while Traveler is a double of Oliveira and holds fast to a more logical and rational position.<sup>30</sup> Oliveira takes a job with them in a circus. The circus represents the centre (the Mandala) and the symbolism of the circus is explicitly referenced throughout. The hole in the carp,

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<sup>28</sup> Ezquerro, Milagros, ‘*Rayuela: estudio temático*’, *Rayuela: edición crítica*, p. 617-8.

<sup>29</sup> Ezquerro, Milagros, ‘*Rayuela*’, p.618.

<sup>30</sup> As regards the theme of the double, Boldy proposes a possible theory for its appearance in Cortázar’s writing: “Delegation is a seminal element in all of Cortázar’s writing and is perhaps the origin of the *dédoublement* of a hypothetical unitary character into Traveler and Oliveira. Traveler’s name is an indication of this. He has never travelled, but Oliveira travels for him; Traveler delegates this ‘travelling’ onto Oliveira, his doppelganger. The attitude of the passive ‘female reader’ is identical to that of Traveler.” (Boldy, Steven *The novels of Julio Cortázar* p.51.)

for example, is representative of an opening through which Oliveira can gain access to paradise. According to Boldy:

His idea of climbing the circus tent pole in Buenos Aires suggests the ascent of the Siberian shaman up the pole or birch tree with nine notches (the nine heavens—the squares of the hopscotch) in order to enter, on behalf of his people, the sacred time, the spirit world above.<sup>31</sup>

The group of friends later decide to take on the running of an insane asylum. This allows Cortázar to explicitly develop his ideas regarding madness/sanity. One key scene takes place in the asylum's morgue, making the Eros/Thanatos theme that appears in Cortázar's notes explicit.<sup>32</sup> The descent into the morgue, where Oliveira kisses Talita, is reminiscent of a mythical descent into Hades to recuperate a lost love. The actors are seen as "messengers": vehicles through which some (divine?) message is being played out.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore there is a suspicion that the message itself may ultimately be incomprehensible to the rational Western way of thinking. This moment of union with Talita leads Oliveira to a realization (or delusion, depending on the interpretation) that she is la Maga, an assertion that Talita resists, stating: "I'm nobody's zombie."<sup>34</sup> The kiss itself is yet another transgression, reminiscent in its physical and symbolic descent with the scene of Oliveira and the clochard in Paris (which is a physical descent below the bridge where obscure forces lurk, and also a symbolic descent in the classical Western tradition). In the novel these transgressions are essential to Oliveira's illumination—his freeing of himself from restricting conceptions of the world and the conventional conduct they demand. This theme is part of the deep structure of much of Cortázar's work:

To decree something a monster is to taboo and repress it, the *figura* is thus a repetition of this repression. It is up to the individual to reverse the pattern of the *figura*, 'demonsterize' the monster and release the force it represents. This inversion demands some form of transgression, which usually corresponds to that for which the monster was originally decreed a monster. Its recovery, its being brought back to life after its destruction, involves (...) the myth of the descent into Hades (by Orpheus, to recover Eurydice). (...) It additionally permits the transgression to be seen as an initiation, purification or trial before the descent can be effected, the monster faced.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Boldy, Steven *The novels of Julio Cortázar* p.68.

<sup>32</sup> Julio Cortázar and Ana Maria Barrenechea, *Cuaderno de bitácora de Rayuela*, p.18.

<sup>33</sup> "He kisses Talita and they both feel that they are golems consummating a union not possible to their masters" Boldy, Steven *The novels of Julio Cortázar* p.85.

<sup>34</sup> Boldy, Steven *The novels of Julio Cortázar* p.84.

<sup>35</sup> Boldy, Steven *The novels of Julio Cortázar* p.67.

As a result of the kiss Oliveira barricades himself in a room, acting like a madman and apparently fearing for his life, having betraying Traveler and now wary of the jealousy that his actions will likely provoke in his friend (nay, rival). Oliveira now moves beyond searching for the centre (as he did in the circus) and approaches a unity: “That the gap is described as *excentración*, separation from the centre, suggests that the centre that Oliveira has sought to define throughout the novel would now mean unity with Traveler, ‘the unity that he used to call the centre’”.<sup>36</sup> Traveler represents “home,” and it is therefore hardly surprising that the union with Traveler occurs at the end of the narrative—a Homeric return for Oliveira after his arduous journey, both spiritual and literal. Yet *Rayuela*, in terms of a modern-day pilgrim narrative, is essentially infused with doubt and furthermore with an acceptance of the possibility of failure as being the end of the journey (if only failure in the most conventional terms). Cortázar stated in his interview with Harss Sosnowski: “*Rayuela* proves how a large part of that search may end in failure, in so far as one cannot stop being a Westerner just like that, with all the Judaeo-Christian tradition we have inherited, and which has made us what we are.”<sup>37</sup>

The use of parallelism between Paris and Buenos Aires is constant. One example is the way that Traveler, upon entering the room where Oliveira has barricaded himself in with string<sup>38</sup> and bowls of water, wets his feet, thus recalling the earlier scene in Paris where Oliveira wets his feet while escorting Trèpat. If part one of the book, set in Paris, is defined by the quote that “Only by living absurdly could one hope to break this infinite absurdity”, then part two could be defined by the quote: “The only possible way of escaping from the territory was to immerse oneself in it to the hilt”. In Boldy’s reading, “the only way to cease to be mad (...) is to become mad by accepting madness.”<sup>39</sup> Boldy’s interpretation of Oliveira’s self-defenestration is that “The jump into the courtyard is not a falling into the awful nothingness of Western existentialism, but an abandoning oneself to the ‘marvelous void’ of Buddhism.”<sup>40</sup> This transcendental reading is supported by the fact that in the final union between

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<sup>36</sup> Boldy, Steven *The novels of Julio Cortázar* p.79.

<sup>37</sup> Boldy, Steven *The novels of Julio Cortázar* p.89.

<sup>38</sup> The string in this scene has its origin in the pre-text *La araña*.

<sup>39</sup> Boldy, Steven *The novels of Julio Cortázar* p.92.

<sup>40</sup> Boldy, Steven *The novels of Julio Cortázar* p.95.

Traveler and Oliveira there is an explicit reference to the ninth square of the rayuela that represents heaven.<sup>41</sup>

It seems that Cortázar, who later became more actively involved in politics, held out hope for a utopian future.

The concept of utopia is a European ideal which has been consubstantial with the idea of America since almost before its discovery. But it has also been a hope cherished by many Latin Americans (...) that the possibilities thwarted in Europe might finally be realized in the New World.<sup>42</sup>

In conclusion, the portraits of the places that Oliveira inhabits are to a large degree subjective and symbolical, and they help us to consider the relation that cities have in the construction of identities. Cortázar demystifies Paris, and also the preconceived notions of an Argentinian in Europe.<sup>43</sup> *Rayuela*, then, can be interpreted as one of the great pilgrim narratives, or travel books, where the discovery of a physical place is placed alongside the internal, spiritual quest. Oliveira, in spite of his attempts to overcome the divisions between *tú* and *yo*, or *el uno* and *el otro*, finds himself to be a kind of Robinson Crusoe—trapped within himself and fettered by Western logic and ideals. The very title of *Rayuela* is a reference to the search for paradise (towards the “cielo” of the rayuela). In Cortázar’s own words, “El poetismo de estas décadas es siempre diario de viaje al paraíso; con frecuencia, también noticia de extravío, mapas errados, retorno melancólico.”<sup>44</sup> In reference to the aforementioned “retorno melancólico,” it is interesting to consider that the word nostalgia is a compound word made up of two greek terms which could be translated as “the pain of returning home,” and it seems relevant therefore to look at some of Cortázar’s comments about nostalgia:

Hay quien vive satisfecho en una dimensión binaria y que prefiere pensar que lo fantástico no es más que una fabricación literaria (...) En lo que a mí se refiere, lo que me ha sido dado inventar en este terreno siempre se ha realizado con una sensación de nostalgia, la nostalgia de no ser capaz de abrir por completo las puertas que en tantas ocasiones he visto abiertas de par en par durante unos pocos

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<sup>41</sup> Citing *Rayuela*: “las miradas de Traveler y Oliveira fue como si dos pajaros chocaran en pleno vuelo y caeran enredados en la casilla nueve.” Yovanovich, Gordana. 1990. *The Role of Women in Julio Cortázar's Rayuela*. Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos, *Presencia y ausencia de la mujer en las letras hispánicas*, 14 (3): pp. 541-552, p.550.

<sup>42</sup> Boldy, Steven *The novels of Julio Cortázar* p.193.

<sup>43</sup> “venir a París para entender a Europa puede terminar en un malentendido absoluto. Bastarán tres horas en avion hasta Munich o Lisbon para descubrirlo.”

Julio Cortázar and Ana Maria Barrenechea, *Cuaderno de bitácora de Rayuela*, p.271

<sup>44</sup> Cortázar, *Obra Critica I*. P.105.

segundos fugaces.<sup>45</sup>

Boldy's speaks about "the generalized nostalgia for a lost Eden, glimpsed in dreams, and a fundamental theme in modern literature" and goes on to translate and interpret some comments by Cortázar regarding nostalgia:

"Everything written nowadays worth reading is orientated towards nostalgia (...) You can kill everything apart from the nostalgia for the kingdom" (...) Paris is the locus of this nostalgia, and existence centred round it, and created by it<sup>46</sup>

*Rayuela*, using Paris and Buenos Aires as two of its primary literary tools, deals with the questioning of how to achieve reconciliation with ourselves and with those around us in the cities we inhabit, and to perhaps recuperate a lost paradise that is intuitively perceived. The necessity for some kind of reconciliation is made paramount in light of the fact that we find ourselves obliged to occupy in large numbers the same spaces, and for this reason the narrative use of space itself and the way in which it affects our identity and our perception is of great importance.

Cortázar, in discussing his book, has stated that it is a book of questions, and not of answers. For this reason, the reader becomes so important and plays such a vital role in the work. In this fashion, he tries to offers us various models for action, with each reader—be they active or passive—having the option to construct a different novel. It has been said that the division of the work into three parts offers the possibility of escaping from a binary and dichotomist way of thinking, offering as it does a third part that is "*prescindible*".<sup>47</sup> Cortázar also asks us to question him as author, the work itself, and the very tools being used to transmit this message (something that will be dealt with more in depth in the final section of the present work). In regards to a philosophical dissection of language, and its poetic use as a way of breaking away from certain preconceptions of "reality" in order to open up new doors of perception, we find the following comments by Octavio Paz to be informative:

Nombrar es ser. La palabra con que nombra a la piedra no es la piedra pero tiene la misma realidad de la piedra....El poeta es la conciencia de las palabras, es decir, la nostalgia de la realidad real de las cosas...Las opacas palabras del poeta irreal evocan el habla del antes del lenguaje, el entrevisto acuerdo paradisiaco. Habla

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<sup>45</sup> Cortázar, Julio 'El estado actual de la narrativa en Hispanoamérica'. Alazraki, Jaime (ed) *Julio Cortázar: La isla final*, p.70.

<sup>46</sup> Boldy, Steven *The novels of Julio Cortázar*, p.53

<sup>47</sup> A third part entitled: "De otros lados."



inocente...la nostalgia de la unidad.<sup>48</sup>

Finally, it is worth bearing in mind that *Rayuela* is one of the works that the author wrote before becoming more explicitly dedicated to political activism, though nevertheless its content encourages us to consider the theme of solidarity and how we are to resolve the conflicts within our societies, and within our very thought systems. One of the quotes that opens the novel summarises concisely the didactic attitude of Cortázar, presented here in a parodically “Argentinian” voice:

“Y ojalá que lo que estoy escribiendo le sirbalguno para que mire bien su comportamiento y que no se arrepienta cuando es tarde y ya todo se ha ido al corno por culpa suya!”—César Bruto<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Paz, Octavio *Cuadrivio* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1991), p.103

<sup>49</sup> Cortázar, Julio *Rayuela*, p.115.

### **3. Oliveira/Maga-Yo/Tú:** ***Reflections of gender and identity***

*writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures.*—Cixous<sup>50</sup>

The aim of this section will be to consider possible criticisms that could be leveled at Cortázar's representations of his characters, and potential justifications if and where they are tenable. It will be key to recall that the novel's inception began with the production of chapter 41,<sup>51</sup> a chapter that Cortázar says is based on "la rivalidad de estos dos hombres con referencia al personaje femenino."<sup>52</sup>

This section will focus on an analysis of the relationship between Oliveira and la Maga, and furthermore all the interrelated aspects of la Maga as reflected in other female characters (doubles etc.) and themes. In fact, we can see that, "Cortázar builds his main female character, not directly, but through a number of women who appear in the novel (and that) the reader is the synthesizing agent in the character rendering".<sup>53</sup> This, then, relates to the final section of the present work ('Zen Di/Visions'), insofar as "the theoretical pieces called "Morelliana" suggest that the coexistent similarities and differences between characters, like the textual fragmentation, purposely destroy the traditional linear understanding of the world with the intention of redefining human identity—man's and woman's alike—from the

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<sup>50</sup> Cixous, Helene, *The Laugh of the Medusa*. Source: *Signs*, Vol 1, No. 4 (Summer, 1976) pp 875-893. Published by: The University of Chicago Press. p.879.

<sup>51</sup> Note: While the pre-text *La araña* contains the nucleus of the novel, the scene of the *tablón* (also referred to as the *puente* scene) was the moment when Cortázar consciously began writing *Rayuela*.

<sup>52</sup> Herráez, Miguel *Dos ciudades en Julio Cortázar*, (Barcelona: Editorial Ronsel, 2006) p.231.

<sup>53</sup> Yovanovich, Gordana. 1990. 'The Role of Women in Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela*', p.541.

point of view of a strong human collective.”<sup>54</sup> Ana Maria Berrenechea, in the *Bitacora*, classifies the “doubles” that are a mainstay of Cortázar’s work into three categories: *Complementarios*, *Gemelos*, and *Versiones deformantes*. Using her classification, Maga and Horacio are complements, Maga and Talita are twins, and Maga and Trèpat are deformed versions of one another.

An analysis of the *Bitacora* reveals that the character of la Maga passed through various manifestations: she at times appears as kind of ghost suitable to the genre of *lo fantástico*;<sup>55</sup> and she also tentatively appears as an artifice, a fictional creation invented by Oliveira to make Talita jealous.<sup>56</sup> Cortázar finally opts for making her a real person and placing her in the real world, albeit a world in which reality itself is put into doubt.

En la función simbólica, la Maga es el vehículo de la confusión de planos realidad-irrealidad-trasrealidad: busca y percepción de una realidad otra. Por eso su figure se entreteje en secuencias de ensueños, fantasmas y locos, con insistencia en las dualidades locura-razón. Este lado-el otro lado.<sup>57</sup>

In Sharkey’s words: “La Maga is the pre-modern, intuitive female who can help the troubled male transcend his inner conflicts; in short, a descendant of Beatrice.”<sup>58</sup> Sharkey goes on to add: “But in the end, Horacio cannot bring himself to take advantage of la Maga’s redemptive possibility. He confesses: “me atormenta tu amor porque no me sirve de puente porque un puente no se sostiene de un solo lado.””<sup>59</sup>

One key theme worthy of consideration, and that regrettably this present essay cannot deal with in any depth, is the use of scatological elements (a topic closely related to one of the main themes throughout the novel of Eros/Thanatos). These scatological elements can be related to some of the theories drawn from the analyses of Freud and Jung,<sup>60</sup> both of whom are cited in the text and must surely have been familiar to the author.<sup>61</sup> We also find a study of Kristeva to contain useful elements relating to this:

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<sup>54</sup> Yovanovich, Gordana. 1990. ‘The Role of Women in Julio Cortázar’s *Rayuela*’, p.542.

<sup>55</sup> See Julio Cortázar and Ana Maria Barrenechea *Cuaderno de bitácora de Rayuela* p.23.

<sup>56</sup> Julio Cortázar and Ana Maria Barrenechea, *Cuaderno de bitácora de Rayuela* p.29.

<sup>57</sup> Julio Cortázar and Ana Maria Barrenechea, *Cuaderno de bitácora de Rayuela* p.55.

<sup>58</sup> Sharkey, Joseph E. ‘*Rayuela*’s Confused Hermeneutics’ *Hispanic Review* 69 (4): pp.423-442,p.426.

<sup>59</sup> Sharkey, Joseph E. ‘*Rayuela*’s Confused Hermeneutics’, p. 427.

<sup>60</sup> Boldy touches on Jung and myths in his analysis of the early short story about the Minotaur, *El Rey*, in a section regarding the theme of “monsters”. p.65 of Boldy, Steven *The novels of Julio Cortázar*.

<sup>61</sup> The issue of transgression is dealt with in Safir’s essay included in the book *Isla Final*.

Nausea, distaste, horror: these are signs of a radical revulsion (or expulsion) which serves to situate the 'I', or more accurately to *create* a first, fragile sense of 'I' in a space where before there was only emptiness. (...) the abject is not linked *per se* to dirt or putrefaction, Kristeva insists that it can be represented by any kind of transgressive, ambiguous or intermediary state.<sup>62</sup>

Boldy also treats this element:

The culmination of the process comes when Oliveira, following the example of Heraclitus, who is said to have buried himself in dung to cure his dropsy, (metaphorically) does the same in his long night with the clochard Emmanuèle (...) Thus, Paris becomes for Oliveira that exact opposite of the 'heaven' of spirituality he had perhaps sought there. The initial dualism of his search is eliminated, Heaven and earth placed firmly on the same level of *human experience*<sup>63</sup>

The placing of the narrative not in the fantastic genre so prevalent in Cortázar's short stories but in a very concrete real world of human experience, while at the same time putting that world's "reality" in doubt, is further explored and developed in the final section of this dissertation.

In regards to the search for a potential unity (an Eden), and how la Maga and the other women play a part in that search,<sup>64</sup> Nouzeilles states:

En este juego de substituciones y desplazamientos, todas las mujeres del texto no son más que los trazos mudos de un objeto irrecuperable.

La segunda modalidad de la búsqueda consiste en el proyecto utópico de hallar y habitar un espacio-otro, un más allá de las categorías epistemológicas del saber occidental<sup>65</sup>

Relating *Rayuela* to *Invisible Cities* within the work of Calvino, Gabriela Nouzeilles offers these interpretations which I find highly pertinent, and useful in the unravelling of the allegorical nature of the novel:

la mujer es tanto la fuente del deseo masculino como el objetivo de la construcción de la ciudad (...) Aunque la cultura se origina en la búsqueda de una mujer y en el deseo de su cautiverio, las mujeres están ausentes tanto de la historia como del proceso de producción cultural que su elusiva imagen desencadena (...) No solo la estructura de la ficción reproduce el recorrido por geografías urbanas (Paris-Buenos Aires) marcadas por la ausencia de una mujer, la Maga, sino que la novela misma

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<sup>62</sup> Toril Moi (ed) *The Kristeva Reader* p.238.

<sup>63</sup> Boldy, Steven *The novels of Julio Cortázar* p.35-36 (my italics).

<sup>64</sup> "La persistencia en el buscar explicaría tanto la serie de encuentros y desencuentros fortuitos en París, como las relaciones adulteras en que Oliveira persigue el cuerpo de la Maga en el cuerpo diferente, y a la vez similar, de la silenciosa Pola." Nouzeilles, Gabriela *La rayuela del sexo según Cortázar* (Barcelona: Cánones literarios masculinos y relecturas transculturales, Ileana Rodríguez (ed.), Anthopos, 2001) p.71.

<sup>65</sup> Nouzeilles, Gabriela *La rayuela del sexo según Cortázar*, p.71.

puede entenderse como el edificio ficcional que se “construye” hasta cierto punto para intentar capturarla.<sup>66</sup>

This constant symbolic use of the female sex could explain Cixous' frustration that men “have made for woman an antinarcissism!” Cixous goes on to define women as: “we the labyrinths, the ladders”.<sup>67</sup> This metaphor is used explicitly in *Rayuela*: “Killing the object of one's love, that old suspicion of man, was the price to pay for not interrupting one's ascent of the ladder.”<sup>68</sup> In *Rayuela* the female characters could be viewed as tools by which one may reach and thus gain access to “el cielo,” and that in order to reach this higher plane it is necessary to supersede narcissism and the obsession with oneself, blending and uniting subject and object, and becoming something else. In fact, the symbol of the rayuela itself can be interpreted thus:

el cielo de la *Rayuela*, el mandala o centro al que tienden las topografías imaginarias de *Rayuela* queda anclado en la vagina, el origen y fin del mundo y de todo sentido, más allá de las diferencias impuestas por la diversidad lingüística de la historia<sup>69</sup>

La Maga and her counterparts open up the possibility of playing with language, and thereby breaking through to a more profound understanding of the world. Perhaps the most notable example of this is represented by the invented language of Gliglício.

De acuerdo con la dinámica de lo que Julia Kristeva llama lo semiótico, es decir, la fase pre-edípica del balbuceo agramatical que se manifiesta en las instancias gozosas y lúdicas del lenguaje, lo “femenino” retornaría en las ausencias, los silencios y las incoherencias que el discurso de la razón reprime.<sup>70</sup>

Cortázar's own personal take on the “woman-as-ladder” theme is developed in his use of “woman-as-bridge.”<sup>71</sup> This is a symbolic feature both in the relationship drawn between la Maga and the bridges of Paris<sup>72</sup> and also in the crucial scene where Talita (Maga's double) is suspended between Oliveira and Traveler, wherein Talita figures as someone who comes between the men, thus making them rivals, while also offering the possibility of a profound reconciliation in her role as mediator. We see Talita's significance made evident in this analysis by Ana Maria Berrenechea:

En un detalle significativo, la que sintió más insistentemente el llamado es la que

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<sup>66</sup> Nouzeilles, Gabriela, *La rayuela del sexo según Cortázar* p.69.

<sup>67</sup> Cixous, Helene, *The Laugh of the Medusa* p.878.

<sup>68</sup> Boldy, Steven, *The novels of Julio Cortázar*, p.71.

<sup>69</sup> Nouzeilles, Gabriela, *La rayuela del sexo según Cortázar*, p.73.

<sup>70</sup> Nouzeilles, Gabriela, *La rayuela del sexo según Cortázar*, p.64-65.

<sup>71</sup> “Christianity (...) sanctioned the transitional function of the maternal by calling the Virgin a 'bond', a 'middle' or an 'interval'” Moi, Toril (ed) *The Kristeva Reader* p.162-63.

<sup>72</sup> “Yo describo y defino y deseo esos ríos, ella los nada.” Julio Cortázar, *Rayuela*, p.234.

borra el camino mandálico y re-instaura el imperio del territorio, cuando se distribuyen tareas para volver a organizar la vida cotidiana: “Talita baja a borrar la rayuela. Destroza el dibujo.”<sup>73</sup>

In relation to the above quote, and the transcendent qualities of the *vida cotidiana*, we find the following interpretation of Talita: “she is able to elevate the traditional role of women; she transforms her domestic chores into an existential game, and gives a philosophical dimension to what traditionally was considered to be secondary in importance.” (In contrast, then, to Gerkepen who doesn’t appear to have those qualities that elevate her status above that of a mere housewife.) Talita is referred to in the novel as “nuestra ninfa Egeria” furthermore emphasising the contentious idea of woman-as-ladder, Egeria being a representation of “the artist’s need for woman as a source of inspiration”.<sup>74</sup> Alongside the symbolic use of the bridge, we also find the symbolic use of books and literature introduced in the scene of the *puente*<sup>75</sup>:

if we return to the *puente* scene, it should not go unnoticed that the bridge is really one of words, at least in the sense that both its ends are held down by heavy volumes, the awful weight of human knowledge, the useless arsenal of ‘cemetery-dictionary’ which they have been using for their intermittent word-game. Language is to be despised, as is knowledge: yet, inexorably, the bridge that serves the making of a literary art must be held in position by words.<sup>76</sup>

Continuing to stress the symbolic importance of the *puente*, the characters involved, and their relationships with each other, we read in the same essay:

Horacio, the Cathar, the pure one, is the true doppelgänger, we are told. Traveler, in contrast, is the flag-bearer of the return home, and of order. Horacio can move to and from that ‘territory’ and the world beyond, but eventually the latter is the place where he belongs. (...) In one sense Horacio and Traveler are Everyman (Manu) in his two aspects. Traveler represents the terrestrial body, the occupant of the territory; Horacio, the astral body, who belongs to a different world; and Talita, the divine spirit essential to both, who exercises a balance between them<sup>77</sup>

Cortázar uses the symbol of the bridge to refer to acts of integration with the “Other”, bridges “del Yo al Tú y al Él,”<sup>78</sup> bridges that refer to “la liquidación del hiato por el puente del hombre que no es ya subjetividad, y la realidad exterior a él que no es ya objetividad, sino superrealidad que involucra ambas instancias en el acto por el

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<sup>73</sup> Julio Cortázar y Ana María Barrenechea, *Cuaderno de bitácora de Rayuela* p.78

<sup>74</sup> Davies, Gareth A. ‘Mondrian, Abstract Art, and Theosophy in Julio Cortázar’s Rayuela’, p.139.

<sup>75</sup> As mentioned previously for clarification, this scene is also referred to as the *tablón* scene.

<sup>76</sup> Davies, Gareth A. ‘Mondrian, Abstract Art, and Theosophy in Julio Cortázar’s Rayuela’, p.140.

<sup>77</sup> Davies, Gareth A. ‘Mondrian, Abstract Art, and Theosophy in Julio Cortázar’s Rayuela’, p.140.

<sup>78</sup> Cortázar, *Obra Crítica I*. p105.

cual el hombre y mundo se integran.”<sup>79</sup> In fact, the first chapter that Cortázar wrote for *Rayuela* was chapter 41. This chapter can be read as a metaphor of the ‘puente del hombre’ from an early essay by Cortázar.<sup>80</sup> The so-called “bridge” scene takes place between Oliveira and his friend (a friend who represents his double: the Oliveira who never left Argentina).<sup>81</sup> The two men convince Traveler’s partner, Talita (a double, or to use the terminology of the *Bitacora*, a *gemelo*, of la Maga) to suspend herself on a plank which is placed between two opposing windows on different floors, in order to pass some nails and a packet of Yerba (a symbol of *Argentinidad*). Playing, thus, with absurd divisions and dichotomies, Oliveira complains constantly of being cold, while Talita complains of heat. The theme of “*convivencia*” (a theme at the very heart of *Rayuela*) features here in regards to the reactions of the neighbours who are witness to this spectacle, which takes place “cuando las personas decentes duermen la siesta.” Once the absurd act has been completed, one of these neighbours comments: “Con las piernas al aire en ese tablón, mire que ejemplo para las criaturas. Usted no se habrá dado cuenta, pero desde aquí se le veía propiamente todo, le juro”.<sup>82</sup> This offers an example of society and its norms criticizing actions that transgress the established norms.

Cortázar has at times been criticized for offering an overly simplistic and stereotypical portrait of the male/female divide, but if we are to look more critically it must be remembered that la Maga (along with her correspondent “*substituciones*” and “*desplazamientos*”) is in no way a typical stereotype of a mother figure, although that symbol is explicitly referred to in both the *Bitacora* and the novel<sup>83</sup>. Despite constant association between la Maga and the earth, she is also portrayed as a negligent, perhaps even indifferent mother.<sup>84</sup> In the novel both Oliveira and la Maga at times

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<sup>79</sup> Cortázar, *Obra Crítica I*. p105.

<sup>80</sup> Cortázar, *Obra Crítica I*. p 104.

<sup>81</sup> “La diferencia entre Manú y yo es que somos casi iguales.” Also: “sos mi *doppelganger*, porque todo el tiempo estoy yendo y viniendo de tu territorio al mío”. Julio Cortázar, *Rayuela*, p.214 and p. 506 respectively.

<sup>82</sup> Cortázar, Julio, *Rayuela*, 417.

<sup>83</sup> “me acerco a las Madres, me conecto al Centro” p.71 Julio Cortázar and Ana María Barrenechea, *Cuaderno de bitácora de Rayuela*.

<sup>84</sup> Cixous criticises the obligation thrust upon women: “guilty at every turn: for having desires, for not having any; for being frigid, for being “too hot”; for not being both at once; for being too motherly and not enough; for having children and for not having any.” Cixous, Helene, *The Laugh of the Medusa* p.880.

share selfish qualities: “En ese entonces no hablamos mucho de Rocamadour, el placer era egoísta...”<sup>85</sup>

We can see that the dichotomy of feminine and masculine is not so clear, as this suggests that Oliveira himself and la Maga are also potentially, to use the terminology of the *Bitacora*, “*complementarios*” of one another—and *not* opposites. Their unification is referenced at in the game they play called “Cyclops,” wherein they are perhaps reaching for a non-dualistic vision. Developing the theme of Maga’s selfishness, in relation to her treatment of Rocamadour, Boldy states: “la Maga sends him off to the country *nourrice* whenever her penchant for singing Hugo Wolf is most active (...) Rocamadour dies, in one sense, as a result of this repression and neglect.”<sup>86</sup>

Speaking further in terms of the rupture of stereotypes within *Rayuela*, if we are to analyse Oliveira, it must be remembered that he claims to have slept with men (for “La experiencia, enténdes”).<sup>87</sup> Also the tendency to see Oliveira as a dominating, masculine figure, and la Maga as weak and passive can be challenged if one takes into account the way in which Cortázar views his character (often perceived as an alter-ego of the author): “Oliveira no es ningún genio, al contrario. Es un hombre sumamente mediocre”<sup>88</sup> It could also be argued that some of the more condescending comments of Oliveira regarding la Maga are intentionally placed so as to critique the small-minded, bourgeois Oliveira (who nevertheless tries desperately to grasp the feminine world that la Maga offers).

It seems that Cortázar’s attempts to break out of binary modes of thinking (the kind of thinking that leaves us stuck with the classification male/female, man/woman, and active/passive) could be related to the structure itself of *Rayuela*: “La organización excéntrica de los materiales del segundo libro posible forma parte de ese mismo proyecto intelectual. Al combinar y conectar discursos heterogéneos, la novela borra las distinciones tradicionales”<sup>89</sup> Regarding the structure of the novel, and more specifically the polemic concept of the *lector hembra*, one commentator states that “the structure of the text itself shall supply us with its own means for the self-

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<sup>85</sup> Cortázar, Julio *Rayuela*, p.133.

<sup>86</sup> Boldy, Steven *The novels of Julio Cortázar* p.35. Boldy elaborates on the relationship between the many scatological references and Rocamadour, and relates them also to the scene with the clochard.

<sup>87</sup> Cortázar, Julio *Rayuela*, p.149.

<sup>88</sup> Herráez, Miguel *Dos ciudades en Julio Cortázar*, (Barcelona: Editorial Ronsel, 2006). p.221.

<sup>89</sup> Nouzeilles, Gabriela, *La rayuela del sexo según Cortázar*, p.71.



deconstruction of the categories (male reader/female reader) it establishes”.<sup>90</sup> And another commentator defends Cortázar against claims of sexism by arguing that “amends more important than Cortázar’s public apologies are made in the novel itself, on both the narrative and the metafictional planes”,<sup>91</sup> a claim which will be further supported in the final section of this essay. Nevertheless, la Maga is “the prototype of the reader who must be done away with”.<sup>92</sup> In a broader reading, then, whereby Cortázar breaks down the reading of situations into simple oppositions in order to offer new interpretations (sexual or otherwise), we find the following analysis:

Si bien se presentan como tareas independientes o paralelas, la búsqueda de la Maga y la de una instancia exterior a Occidente terminan superponiéndose, al confundirse una con la otra...la posibilidad de acceso a ese espacio utópico de anulación de los contrarios y superación de la metafísica occidental se relaciona sobre todo con el ejercicio de prácticas marginales, en la novela la clave del ingreso a ese lugar es la sexualidad femenina.<sup>93</sup>

While the usage of women, and the feminine, as a “clave de ingreso” may strike some as an overused, even sexist, literary artifice, let it not be forgotten the importance that the “anulación de los contrarios” has played in certain feminist theories.

It can also be shown that ultimately la Maga is offered as the model for what Oliveira is searching for and, what’s more, that her capacity to grasp this other world is innate, thus making her potentially superior to the male characters who use a failed logic to attempt to grasp the ungraspable.<sup>94</sup> Oliveira states that “Era insensato querer explicarle algo a la Maga...”, but nevertheless “la Maga se asomaba a cada rato a esas grandes terrazas sin tiempo que todos ellos buscaban dialécticamente.”<sup>95</sup> Also we see that la Maga challenges “los malabarismos intelectuales de su amante”, intellectual

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<sup>90</sup> Chatzivasileiou, Litsa. 2001. ‘Rereading Rayuela: Hypergraphy, Hermaphrodism, and Schizophrenia’, p. 398. (Also, on p. 406, we find the following: “Is it not that according to *Rayuela*’s own premises, the disintegration of dialectics, logocentrism, pseudo-morality and anthropomorphy, also involves the playful, “diabolical inversion,” subversion, destruction, “declassification,” “uncategorization” (to use Yurkievich’s terms), or even misplacement of binary and *misogynous* sexual signs in which its readership is caught?”)

<sup>91</sup> Sharkey, Joseph E. ‘*Rayuela*’s Confused Hermeneutics’, p. 425.

<sup>92</sup> Sharkey, Joseph E. ‘*Rayuela*’s Confused Hermeneutics’, p. 429.

<sup>93</sup> Nouzeilles, Gabriela, *La rayuela del sexo según Cortázar*, p.71.

<sup>94</sup> One could possibly defend against some of the claims of misogyny laid upon Cortázar by demonstrating that la Maga is in many ways superior to Oliveira, although the complaint may still stand that she, as a female, has been embodied as innately intuitive, and thereby adheres to a degree to a stereotypical gender interpretation (that would furthermore, then, extend to a stereotypical representation of the men as logical by nature). In light of the content of the novel, it must not be forgotten how important and intentional the symbolic, archetypal, and mythical is in Cortázar’s work.

<sup>95</sup> Cortázar, Julio *Rayuela*, p.150.

juggling that, as we have mentioned, can be viewed as a desperate struggle of an essentially flawed protagonist who does not have the answers, and is trapped by Judaeo-Christian thought, trapped by his language and trapped by History. There is a possible interpretation of the two models, which is as follows:

the stereotypical female's mode of understanding is portrayed as generally superior to that of the stereotypically male. Specifically, La Maga's intuition beats Horacio's hyperintellectuality. Moreover, La Maga's "passivity" is revealed as the condition of her strength: her self-forgetfulness, even self-effacement, is inseparable from her receptivity to the world. Horacio's hyperactive intellectuality is revealed as the condition of his weakness: his perpetual self-consciousness and desperate self-assertion make him unreceptive to the world.<sup>96</sup>

La Maga also offers some biting criticism of the character of Oliveira, which he instantly accepts as incisive: "No te vas porque sos bastante burgués y tomás en cuenta lo que pensarían Ronald y Babs y los otros amigos."<sup>97</sup>

The narrative that develops between Oliveira and la Maga ends with Oliveira's suspicion that la Maga has thrown herself into the Seine river. This act of committing suicide is later to be mirrored by Oliveira in the enigmatic ending of chapter 56. Oliveira searches for her, and things related to her, through contact with *lo otro*,<sup>98</sup> for example by visiting the aforementioned *clochard* who lives beneath a bridge. This defining chapter with the *clochard* ends with Oliveira's arrest and return to Argentina. This chapter affirms an obsession with language as a form of identity, related to concepts of nation, and to the "Other," and shows how the symbolism of women and feminine qualities are intrinsically related to Oliveira's search in Paris. We also see how, just before he leaves Paris and returns to his homeland (about to cross the bridge between two worlds), the *clochard* sings a song in French, entitled *La mort du loup*, and Oliveira replies with quotes from *Martín Fierro*, an epic poem that represents the "gaucho" spirit of Argentina. Oliveira searches for la Maga in the *clochard*, that is to say, he looks for a woman who is in some way related to the river and its bridges (the river and the bridges being places that are strongly associated with his image of la Maga, and it would seem with women in general as conceived in the narrative of

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<sup>96</sup> Sharkey, Joseph E. 'Rayuela's Confused Hermeneutics', p.425. (The author goes on to add that, "while unwitting amends have been made, passivity is still owed a formal apology.").

<sup>97</sup> Cortázar, Julio *Rayuela*, p.220.

<sup>98</sup> "But through his frustrated relationship with la Maga, his quest comes to be framed in increasingly human terms; to reach the *centro* becomes union with another. *El otro* becomes *lo otro*—another person becomes otherness." Boldy, Steven *The novels of Julio Cortázar* p.56.

*Rayuela*).<sup>99</sup> In fact, the correlation between his loved one and the symbolic juxtaposition with rivers and bridges opens the book:

¿Encontraría a la Maga? Tantas veces me había bastado asomarme, viniendo por la rue de Seine, al arco que da al Quai de Conti, y apenas la luz de ceniza y oliva que flota sobre el río me dejaba distinguir las formas, ya su silueta se inscribía en el Pont Des Arts, a veces andando de un lado a otro.<sup>100</sup>

But it is all in vain. Although as he finds himself at the edge of “la otredad,” he is unable to “franquearlo”<sup>101</sup> and subsequently finds himself returned to Argentina where his mental condition worsens, eventually finding himself in an insane asylum, ostensibly contemplating jumping through a window, an act akin to some kind of Zen “leap” of consciousness.<sup>102</sup>

Relating section one (on place and identity, both literal and symbolic) and this section (with a focus on gender identity), we should consider the notion that “the inscription of gender difference” is a “Western prison house.”<sup>103</sup> Boldy hypothesizes that in *El otro cielo*, one of Cortázar’s other stories where Paris and Buenos Aires are protagonists: “the Parisian and Buenos Aires shopping arcades become ‘narrative vaginas that envelop the narrator/protagonist until he begins to penetrate them at will’; they ‘erect interstitial cultural spaces’”<sup>104</sup>

Before closing this section, I’d like to briefly deal with some of the guiding elements that appear in the pre-text of the *Bitacora*. First off, I wish to draw attention to three characteristic elements in the pre-text that ultimately form *Rayuela*. Ana Maria Barrenechea lists in the *Bitacora* the guiding elements present in the pre-text:

- 1) el deseo de realizar una obra que tenga el gesto amplio de la novela (en oposición al cuento) pero que rompa con las convenciones del lenguaje y del

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<sup>99</sup> Aside from the obvious association female/water, we could go further and look at the phenomenon of modern city life as key to the production itself, in formal terms of the novel, and a possible deeper symbolic reading of this “aquatic” element. See the following quote from Thüsen, Joachim von der ‘*The City as Metaphor, Metonym and Symbol*’, p.11: “On its presentational level the modern city novel follows “aquatic patterns”: it’s narrative arrangement of perceptions and episode has “meandering” and even “oceanic” qualities. (...) in such “aquatic” images the metaphorical tendency to arrest all fleeting impressions and to contain the incomprehensible is reduced to a minimum.”

<sup>100</sup> Julio Cortázar, *Rayuela*, p. 119.

<sup>101</sup> Julio Cortázar, *Rayuela*, p. 240.

<sup>102</sup> ‘an extreme point from which once more to attempt the leap from the one into the other and at the same time from the other into the one’ From *Rayuela* as translated and cited by Boldy, Steven *The novels of Julio Cortázar* p. 93.

<sup>103</sup> Jordan, Paul. 2000. Review of *Writing Paris: Urban Topographies of Desire in Contemporary Latin American Fiction* by Marcy E. Schwartz. *The Modern Language Review*, 95 (4): pp. 1112-1113.

<sup>104</sup> *The modern language review*, Vol 95, No 4 (Oct 2000), pp.1112-1113.

- género, las haga estallar y construya con su fragmentos una nueva figura (retórica);
- 2) la creación de una fábula que sea metáfora de la busca de un absoluto, un laberíntico mandala que puede desembocar en el centro o la nada y cuyas peripecias no están precisadas con claridad de antemano;
  - 3) la lucha paralela de dos principios fundadores, Eros/Thánatos.
- Nótese que los tres puntos separados por mí didácticamente, están imbricados, puesto que en todos ellos existe una dialéctica de conjunción/disyunción, de plenitud/vacío; también porque a cada paso surge la posibilidad de reversión de los polos, y aún más, la fusión de escritura, erotismo y absoluto. Fuera de este impulso que aparece documentado desde las primeras páginas del pre-texto, el camino de la narratividad es azaroso.<sup>105</sup>

It is interesting to see that while on one hand Cortázar was carefully shaping the novel, on the other hand he abandoned himself to the kind of aleatoric and intuitive path that he preaches in the final work. The first two issues in the above quote, related to the structure of the work, will be dealt with in the final section of this dissertation. Let us, then, look at number 3. Cortázar seems to have grasped the function of myths, as analyzed by Lévi-Strauss, in that they deal primarily with opposing elements and how to mediate between them.<sup>106</sup> This, in terms of gender, is a potentially very fruitful approach yet it need not be limited to a simple dichotomy of male/female, as it reaches (one could even say mystically) into *everything*. The novel itself is designed as a kind of tool through which we can mediate these tensions.

La literatura o la pintura sirven, pues, para replantear la relación del sujeto cognoscente con el objeto, y la del arte con la realidad. No se trata del simple corte con los referentes, de la autonomía de la obra de arte, sino de algo más: se trata de la creación de nuevos objetos (de artefactos) que de algún modo descubran por su existencia otro orbe de posibilidades y relaciones, es decir, con su lectura de la "realidad" otros referentes antes "ilegibles".<sup>107</sup> (...) la estructura que organiza *Rayuela* con dos bloques bien separados y al mismo tiempo unidos por canales complejos para comunicar su naturaleza paradójica, en la que confluyen los opuestos fragmentación/unidad, disyunción/conjunción.<sup>108</sup>

One notable feature of the development of *Rayuela* is the brief story entitled *La araña* that is essentially the principle text—the nucleus—on which all of *Rayuela* is

<sup>105</sup> Barrenechea, Ana Maria 'Genesis y circunstancias,' *Rayuela: edición crítica*, p.552.

<sup>106</sup> "From the combination of the two things, a third one should be born" (Quote from *Rayuela*, used in Boldy, Steven *The novels of Julio Cortázar* p.85.)

<sup>107</sup> Cortázar, Julio *Cuaderno de bitácora de Rayuela*, p.104.

<sup>108</sup> Cortázar, Julio *Cuaderno de bitácora de Rayuela*, p.110.

founded.<sup>109</sup> *La araña* reveals that one of the principle concerns of Cortázar was to explore the divide Eros/Thanatos.<sup>110</sup> In relation to how this piece later shaped the final work, we can see the very open-ended structure of the novel itself (a novel which potentially offers some kind of liberation if one is able to untangle it in the right way) is reflected in the notion that *La araña* “muestra, pues, una red que puede atrapar, pero al mismo tiempo el laberinto de hilos que coexiste con posibles salidas hacia la plenitud o hacia el vacío”.<sup>111</sup> The story itself is an erotically charged piece that shows the influence that De Sade and Bataille obviously had on Cortázar. A Safir, in the essay *Para un erotismo de la liberación: notas sobre el comportamiento transgresivo en Rayuela y libro de Manuel*, says that Cortázar learned from De Sade “los poderosos efectos de la conducta excepcional”.<sup>112</sup> Relating eroticism to the production of the artefact we now call *Rayuela*, “la importancia de las transgresiones eróticas en estas novelas no es su erotismo *per se*, sino más bien su fundamental repetición de la tradición occidental del descenso, muerte y resurrección.”<sup>113</sup> Safir goes on to speak of how certain acts of writing themselves are taboos of bourgeois society,<sup>114</sup> and there is no doubt that at the time of publication and still today there are those that would criticise the “open” nature of *Rayuela* as a novelty, and classify the *capítulos prescindibles* as completely superfluous (a proposal that ironically Cortázar supports those readers in doing). Bataille called this kind of literature “despertadora”:

escribir constituye una violación de la vida (cuando la individualidad de cada elemento se destruye y la continuidad del conjunto queda liberada pudiendo relevarse).

El texto, así, en el proceso de ser escrito y leído representa una "petite mort" liberadora, similar a la que hallamos en el acto erótico transgresivo.<sup>115</sup>

It is no doubt clear that the struggle between binary opposites, and the urge to mediate between them and escape false categories, is a prime concern in Cortázar's

<sup>109</sup> Barrenechea defines the dream that plays with time and space by unifying the childhood home in Bánfield with the Paris home in Piere Leroux as the “matriz” of *Rayuela*. See *Rayuela: edición crítica*, p.560.

<sup>110</sup> “También encarna el peligro de la mujer castradora y devoradora (la Madre Terrible) presente en la pareja Eros/Thanatos, el vacío y el aniquilamiento que corroen la imagen del paraíso” Barrenechea, Ana María ‘*Genesis y circunstancias*,’ *Rayuela, edición crítica*, p.564.

<sup>111</sup> Cortázar, Julio *Cuaderno de bitácora de Rayuela*, p22.

<sup>112</sup> Safir, Margery A. ‘*Para un erotismo de la liberación: notas sobre el comportamiento transgresivo en Rayuela y Libro de Manuel*,’ Alazraki, Jaime (ed) *Julio Cortázar: La isla final*, p.225.

<sup>113</sup> Safir, Margery A. ‘*Para un erotismo de la liberación*,’ p.247.

<sup>114</sup> “junto a los tabúes de la muerte y el erotismo, ciertas formas de escribir son en sí mismas un tabú de la sociedad burguesa.” (Cortázar, Julio *La isla final* p.249.)

<sup>115</sup> Safir, Margery A. ‘*Para un erotismo de la liberación*,’ p. 250.

work and, if we are to take Lévi-Strauss's theories on board, a fundamental element of human thought that is reflected primarily in our myths. The first chapter that Cortázar wrote for *Rayuela*<sup>116</sup> is the episode where Talita is suspended on a bridge between the two men, and its primary function is to mark “la noción de dos espacios y dos tiempos o historias que están nítidamente separados y que hay que unir”.

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<sup>116</sup> *La araña* being viewed more as the “nucleus,” to use the terms of the *Bitacora*

## 4. Zen di/visions: Orient/Occident

### 4.1. Rayuela/Mandala

*él empieza a poner en crisis eso que se da en llamar la civilización judeo-cristiana (...) Oliveira tiene suficiente inteligencia para darse cuenta de que la mentalidad humana siguió un camino distinto según se proyectara hacia el Occidente o hacia el Oriente. Dio como resultado dos visiones del mundo (...) el hecho de que haya dos, lo lleva a preguntarse: pero bueno, podría haber habido catorce o cinco o diecisiete, ¿por qué estamos tan seguros de que nuestra civilización occidental es la buena? ¿por qué estamos tan seguros del progreso?’’<sup>117</sup>*

When Oliveira says, “todo ese abecé de mi vida era una penosa estupidez porque se quedaba en mero movimiento dialéctico, en la elección de una inconducta en vez de una conducta”,<sup>118</sup> it brings to mind the Buddhist notion of non-action (although in this context his non-action is seen as a failure, precisely because of its perception within a framework of binary opposites that fail to admit the unity of things that exists beyond mere dialectics). Boldy comments, thus:

The whole ideal of *Rayuela* is to reach a state with no opposite, a non-dualistic state, such as ‘a sanity (razón) other than that sanity the failure of which is madness’ (...) The two terms ‘madness’ and ‘insanity’ will become increasingly important in the second part. (...) Oliveira definitely demands a *signe*, something that will justify his choice and make it inevitable.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Herráez, Miguel *Dos ciudades en Julio Cortázar* p.220-221.

<sup>118</sup> Cortázar, Julio, *Rayuela*, p.134.

<sup>119</sup> Steven Boldy, *The novels of Julio Cortázar* p.53-54.

According to Brody, dualism has “contributed to the present suffering state of Western civilization, marked by increased emphasis on technological advances and by an unwillingness to attempt to reverse the trend of spiritual deterioration.”<sup>120</sup>

Referencing this to the gender focused section of my dissertation, we could add that: “El movimiento crítico de la gynesis auspiciaría el desmantelamiento del sistema de oposiciones binarias que ha dominado el pensamiento occidental (...razón/instinto...hombre/mujer, etc.)”<sup>121</sup> While Cortázar could be criticized for setting up a series of opposites that support traditional images of masculine and feminine as active and passive, the novel can also be interpreted as an attempt to invalidate and escape these opposites that are ultimately corrupting. We could relate this to the fall from Eden:

An original presence, or unity of man with himself and his world (Eden), has been lost. This loss is represented and repeated in the novels in the repression by the individual of parallel forces in himself. Dualism is created by the splitting of the unity of man into, crudely, the repressor and the repressed. The force, on being repressed, becomes taboo. The tabooed force (...) must be transgressed if the repetitive pattern is to be broken or reversed, and the presence recovered. (...) The presence is embodied principally in certain female characters, of which La Maga in *Rayuela* is perhaps the prime example.<sup>122</sup>

Watts, quoting a Buddhist text, states that through a “method of opposites mutually related there arises an understanding of the Middle Way”. In regards to the mythical, which Cortázar frequently mined (the writer Mircea Eliade being one of the names referenced in the *Bitacora*), we find the following quote by Octavio Paz:

Lévi-Strauss afirma que el mito “tiene por objeto ofrecer un modelo lógico para resolver una contradicción—algo irrealizable si la contradicción es real”. Observo, en consecuencia, una diferencia entre el pensar mítico y el del hombre moderno: en el mito se despliega una lógica que no se enfrenta a la realidad y su coherencia es meramente formal (...) el significado de los mitos se despliega en una región que está más allá del lenguaje<sup>123</sup>

In the novel’s use of dichotomies and binary oppositions we find something equivalent to a yin and yang view of the world. For example, Paris and Buenos Aires represent the “sí y el no que existe en todo, muestras del perspectivismo que es

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<sup>120</sup> Brody, Robert *Julio Cortázar: Rayuela*, (London: Grant & Cutler, 1976). p.10.

<sup>121</sup> Nouzeilles, Gabriela *La rayuela del sexo según Cortázar* p.64-65.

<sup>122</sup> Steven Boldy, *The novels of Julio Cortázar* p.7.

<sup>123</sup> Paz, Octavio, ‘Claude Lévi-Strauss o el nuevo festín de esopo’. *Ideas y costumbres II: Usos y símbolos*. México: Circulo de lectores, fondo de cultura económica 2004, p. 507.



ineludible para encarar adecuadamente la realidad.”<sup>124</sup> But ultimately, as Oliveira comments, “París es un centro, entendés, un mandala que hay que recorrer sin dialéctica”<sup>125</sup>

Before going any further it would seem an opportune moment to focus on the importance of the novel’s title, and the symbol at the very heart of the work: the rayuela. In the novel we find the following: “El rectángulo de partida, equivalente a tierra, representa el atrio; el recorrido, originalmente en siete partes (días de la semana o círculos celestes), se desarrolla a través de la nave para desembocar en la medialuna del paraíso o ábside”<sup>126</sup>

Regarding the symbolic use of Paris and Argentina, and in relation to the symbol of the rayuela, David Viñas speaks of the “trip to Europe” as a moving away from the “body” of Argentina (and stereotypically associated *Gaacho* elements) in contrast with the “spirit” that is embodied in Europe. Boldy judges Viñas’s comments thus: “He consequently sees Oliveira-Cortázar’s residence in Paris as a move from the ‘earth’ (body, Buenos Aires) of the hopscotch to its ‘heaven’ (spirit, Paris).”<sup>127</sup>

In the *Bitacora* we can see that Cortázar considered the title *Mandala* for his novel, but finally opted for *Rayuela*. “Al titularse *Rayuela* privilegia la noción de juego sobre la de ritual iniciático (...) propone un entretenimiento infantil jugando ingenuamente, ignorando que se trata de la figura de la basílica cristiana”<sup>128</sup> This playful tendency is further reinforced by a great deal of humour and irreverent comments.<sup>129</sup> In the *Bitacora* we see Cortázar note the variant names for the game: “Rayuela: Avión, Reina Mora, Invernáculo (?), Ratlleta (catalán), Mariola (Galicia y Coruña)”<sup>130</sup>

Among the labyrinth of elements that are at play in *Rayuela* we find that some specialists have singled out the use of colour as worthy of analysis<sup>131</sup>:

As for the indication of certain colours with the various astral planes, Cortázar does

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<sup>124</sup> Amorós, Andrés ‘*Rayuela nueva lectura*.’ Alazraki, Jaime (ed) *Julio Cortázar: La isla final*, p.110.

<sup>125</sup> Safir, Margery A. ‘*Para un erotismo de la liberación*’, p.257.

<sup>126</sup> Yurkievich, Saul ‘*Eros ludens: juego, amor, humor según Rayuela*.’ Alazraki, Jaime (ed) *Julio Cortázar: La isla fina*, p.255. (The quote goes on to add: “propone un entretenimiento infantil jugando ingenuamente, ignorando que se trata de la figura de la basílica cristiana”).

<sup>127</sup> Steven Boldy, *The novels of Julio Cortázar* p.34.

<sup>128</sup> Yurkievich, Saul ‘*Eros ludens*’, p.255.

<sup>129</sup> “ese humor templea toda doctrina (...) hace perdonar todo posible esnobismo.” Amorós, Andrés ‘*Rayuela nueva lectura*’, p.149.

<sup>130</sup> Cortázar, Julio *Cuaderno de bitácora de Rayuela*, p.255.

<sup>131</sup> See for example Julio Ortega’s introduction to *Rayuela, edición crítica*, p. XXXIV.

not seem to have sought any consistency of development (...) Cortázar's main preoccupation is with violet, colour of Nirvana, that occurs in the final scenes near the hopscotch.<sup>132</sup>

In the novel itself we are given a description of the rayuela and its functions:

la piedrita tenia que pasar por el ojo del culo,<sup>133</sup> metida a patadas por la punta del zapato, y de la Tierra al Cielo las casillas estarían abiertas, el laberinto se desplegaría como una cuerda de reloj rota haciendo saltar en mil pedazos el tiempo de los empleados.<sup>134</sup>

This mention of the “tiempo de los empleados” leads us to consider the way in which Emmanuèle is used in the novel as exemplary of a group of outsiders, namely the homeless, who exist outside the sphere of capitalist work and gain, and who are more able to perceive the other world Oliveira is trying so desperately to access:

Los avanzados estudios antropológicos y psicólogos del siglo XX sugieren que el trabajo es la actividad que separa al hombre del animal y que constituye la base de la sociedad. Como eje de la sociedad el trabajo es también la fuente de toda represión. (...) el único grupo humano que escapa de los tabúes mas elementales es el que Batailles llama el “mundo”, una subcultura que, como los clochards de *Rayuela*, existe fuera de las exigencias del trabajo.<sup>135</sup>

Oliveira's contact with the clochard is his “contraataque a la Gran Costumbre” in recognition of the fact that “la desconducta” (as it is practiced for example by the homeless) is an altogether social act.<sup>136</sup> Unlike Judeo-Christian philosophy, Buddhism is “a liberation from conventions of every kind, including the moral conventions.”<sup>137</sup>

Being playful, then, is one of the ways in which Cortázar proposes a new path.

El juego, ruptura del continuo normal (...) escinde el orden del realismo utilitario al instaurar una comunidad aparte en un dominio esperado, posibilita un contacto extraordinario con la realidad. Implica un trastrocamiento propenso a ritualizarse por su contigüidad con lo mítico, lo esotérico. (...). El juego se convierte en puente hacia la solidaridad cósmica.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Davies, Gareth A. 'Mondrian, Abstract Art, and Theosophy in Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela*', p. 137-138.

<sup>133</sup> For more on the concept of the “ojo del culo” see the chapter on metaphor in Octavio Paz's *Conjunciones y disyunciones*. (For example p.112 of *Ideas y costumbres II*.)

<sup>134</sup> Safir, Margery A. 'Para un erotismo de la liberación', p.236.

<sup>135</sup> Safir, Margery A. 'Para un erotismo de la liberación', p.229.

<sup>136</sup> Yurkievich, Saul 'Eros ludens', p.259.

<sup>137</sup> Watts, Alan W. *The Way of Zen*, (New York: Mentor books 1961) p. 111. (Cortázar states in *Rayuela*, p.727: “¿Qué epifanía podemos esperar si nos estamos ahogando en la más falsa de las libertades, la dialectica judeocristiana?”)

<sup>138</sup> Yurkievich, Saul 'Eros ludens', p.260.

When Traveler, who is to a certain degree the voice of conformity, resists these games and asks why he should play them, Oliveira reinforces the transcendental nature that motivates him: “games play themselves, it’s you who’s putting a spanner in the works.”<sup>139</sup> We can read the *preguntas balanzas*, that Oliveira plays with Talita and Traveler, as a kind of Zen *koan* dialogue—a dialogue that is itself a kind of existential game.

#### 4.2. KOANS: LENGUAJE Y LÓ(GI)CA

*“I have no peace of mind (hsin),” said Hui-k’o. “Please pacify my mind.”*

*“Bring out your mind here before me,” replied Bodhidharma, “and I will pacify it!”*

*“But when I seek my own mind,” said Hui-k’o, “I cannot find it.”*

*“There!” snapped Bodhidharma, “I have pacified your mind!”<sup>140</sup>*

The use of ruptures of reason employed by Zen masters is considered a key element of Zen. There are many anecdotes whereby a student’s question is answered by throwing a shoe at their head, and other such “non-sense,” and a frequent method for helping the student gain illumination is the use of *koans*, a kind of riddle—an anti-logical dialectic.<sup>141</sup> With this in mind, we could view Cortázar as a maestro who is trying with his alternative “novel” to break through to us, the readers.

una — por lo menos—de las intenciones básicas de Cortázar (...) es establecer un súbito y brusco cambio de perspectivas mediante el cual lo más cotidiano se vuelve insólito, hermoso o terrible. En el fondo, se trata de *descentrar* nuestro objetivo para socavar la solidez de la realidad externa.<sup>142</sup>

Cortázar makes use of a great number of techniques to create these “ruptures,” through which we can glimpse something “más allá”. Among these ruptures we could mention, for example, the use of alternative spellings (as in the case of the frequent inclusion of the letter “h” to reduce the seriousness of the grand concepts being

<sup>139</sup> Boldy, Steven *The novels of Julio Cortázar* p.88.

<sup>140</sup> Watts, Alan W. *The Way of Zen*, p.92.

<sup>141</sup> Dialectic in the sense of a question and answer dialogue, albeit a uniquely zen dialogue that defies categorization. For more, refer to the chapter ‘*Za-zen and the Koan*,’ in A.Watts’s *The Way of Zen*).

<sup>142</sup> Amorós, Andrés, ‘*Rayuela nueva lectura*’, p.115 (The quote goes on to add: “Más aún, demostrar y dejar abierta la posibilidad de que, en cualquier momento, cualquier fragmento de realidad sea sometida a esta operación—en el fondo, realísima—que la convierta en una inesperada fantasmagoría.”)

enounced); also the use of sentences that are left unconcluded; the use of opposites such as the “bofetada dulce”;<sup>143</sup> and also the inclusion of chaotic listing (chaotic listing that brings to mind the oriental list created by Borges and cited in the preface of Foucault’s *The Order Of Things*, Borges’s list being an alternative way of categorizing the world<sup>144</sup>). One of the most important ruptures, however, is that posed by the “anti-novel” (or as Cortázar liked to call it the contra-novel) that is *Rayuela*. In order to analyse this aspect we will later focus on Morelli, and his literary philosophy that, in *Rayuela*, becomes a snake that eats its own tale.

Western History is responsible for “the passing off as something which is arbitrary and historical as natural and thus true” and “(l)anguage is seen as the coagulator of this false truth and unity: Loads of folk settled comfortably into a supposed unity of person which was no more than a linguistic unity.”<sup>145</sup> In Zen Buddhism, this aforementioned “false truth” could be read as a doubt in the ability of language to convey messages that, ultimately, transcend words—and furthermore is related in the very suspicion of a unity of an “I”. This questioning of the ego—of a cohesive “Yo”—is strongly linked to the themes of eroticism and death that are so prevalent in *Rayuela*. See, for example, the following words of Bataille:

ser individuo es interrumpir el espacio continuo de la humanidad. La muerte, por otra parte, es una continuidad no solo por su permanencia, sino por encima de todo a causa de la nada que aparece cuando la continuidad de cada ser discontinuo queda borrada. Un acto erotico, en realidad, es un movimiento entre nuestra precaria discontinuidad y continuidad.<sup>146</sup>

If language is truly the space of identity—the place where, among other things, we define ourselves—then it is necessary to deconstruct this language if we want to also question a false unity of ego and the falsity of the world that ego subsequently inhabits.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> “Oliveira emplea—igual que antes lo habían hecho el petrarquista o el escritor místico—una técnica de opósitos puesta al día: “ternura rencorosa, bofetada dulce, puntapié de abejas, luz negra, antimateria”. Se trata, en definitiva, de sentir—y expresar—“algo tan contradictorio que debía ser la verdad misma”” Amorós, Andrés, ‘*Rayuela nueva lectura*’, p.117.

<sup>144</sup> This relates to Traveler and Talita’s interest in Ceferino Piaz, “who classifies the whole world according to colours and extravagant corporations”. To cite Borges: “there is no classification of the universe which is not arbitrary and conjectural”. Boldy, Steven *The novels of Julio Cortázar*, p.80.

<sup>145</sup> Boldy, Steven *The novels of Julio Cortázar*, p.50.

<sup>146</sup> Safir, Margery A. ‘*Para un erotismo de la liberación*’, p.233.

<sup>147</sup> “Oliveira corrige a Descartes, no es valido para él el “cogito ergo sum”. Piensa, desde luego, pero eso no significa con seguridad que exista, sino, por el contrario, que anda siempre a la búsqueda de una identidad nunca alcanzada del todo, de un “existo” en plenitud que siempre se escapa de las manos.” Amorós, Andrés ‘*Rayuela nueva lectura*’, p.141.

It would seem, then, that to get rid of the subjective distinction between “me” and “my experience”—through seeing that my idea of myself is not myself—is to discover the actual relationship between myself and the “outside” world. The individual, on the one hand, and the world, on the other, are simply the abstract limits or terms of a concrete reality which is “between” them, as the concrete coin is “between” the abstract Euclidean surfaces of its two sides. Similarly, the reality of all “inseparable opposites”—life and death, good and evil, pleasure and pain, gain and loss—is that “between” for which we have no words.”<sup>148</sup>

Relating this to the “doubling” that occurs between Oliveira and Traveler, it is interesting that Cortázar uses the metaphor of a see-saw to explain the relationship between the two men: “Como dos mellizos que juegan en un sube y baja”.<sup>149</sup> And in this game, “a veces prima el Yin y a veces el Yang, pero en las dos puntas del sube y baja hay dos homo sapiens igualmente inexplicados, dando grandes patadas en el suelo para remontarse el uno a expensas del otro.”<sup>150</sup> This reinforces the metaphor of two sides of a coin employed by Watts: “subject and object are relational, like the two sides of a coin, so that when one pursues, the other retreats.”<sup>151</sup>

It’s not surprising that there are so many references to art in *Rayuela*: “si el acto de la reflexión implica la separación entre el Sujeto (que piensa) y el Objeto (pensado), el arte, en general, es una de las vías más apropiadas para conseguir ese estado ideal de la indiferenciación, ya que se basa en la percepción y la intuición que no delimitan ni discriminan.”<sup>152</sup> This is why Cortázar so vehemently defended surrealism, an artistic movement that searched for an alternative “reality” through non-conventional means. Cortázar says he identifies with Oliveira’s quest, stating that he finds Oliveira’s vision marvellous:

Maravillosa en el sentido de que él cree que la realidad cotidiana enmascara una segunda realidad que no es ni misteriosa, ni transcendente, ni teológica, sino que es profundamente humana pero que por una serie de equivocaciones (...) ha quedado como enmascarada detrás de una realidad prefabricada con mucho años de cultura<sup>153</sup>

An important feature of Zen Buddhism is its insistence on the fact that once illuminated the individual returns to the same world as before. “Lo absurdo no son las

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<sup>148</sup> Watts, Alan W. *The Way of Zen*, p.122.

<sup>149</sup> Cortázar, Julio *Rayuela*, p. 499.

<sup>150</sup> Cortázar, Julio *Rayuela*, p. 308.

<sup>151</sup> Watts, Alan W. *The Way of Zen* p.57.

<sup>152</sup> Wei Wang *Poemas del río wang*, (trans. Pilar González España, Madrid: Trotta press 2004) p.32.

<sup>153</sup> Alazraki, Jaime (ed) *En busca del unicornio: Los cuentos de Julio Cortázar, elementos para una poética de lo neofantástico*, (Madrid, Editorial Gredos. Biblioteca Romanica Hispanica. 1983) p.77.

cosas, lo absurdo es que las cosas estén ahí y las sentimos como absurdas.”<sup>154</sup> It is for this reason that we can see how Cortázar toyed with the idea of using “fantastic” elements in *Rayuela* but ultimately rejected that idea.<sup>155</sup> Alan Watts tackles this problem of the “real” world, and how it is revealed through the question and answer of the koans, in his incisive work *The Way of Zen*. Watts states that many commentators are “mistaken in supposing that the main point is the communication of some Buddhist principle by means of a symbol” and goes on to add:

The *satori*<sup>156</sup> which so frequently follows these interchanges is by no means a mere comprehension of the answer to a riddle. For whatever the Zen master says or does is a direct and spontaneous utterance of “suchness,” of his Buddha nature, and what he gives is no symbol but the very thing.<sup>157</sup>

The Zen techniques practiced by the great maestros, and perpetuated by their disciples, demonstrate an abundance of “artistic,” and more often than not non-verbal, tools for gaining awareness and breaking through to a more “real” reality. Buddha’s illumination was in fact “explained” by simply holding up a flower.<sup>158</sup> In this regards we can see la Maga as a proponent of this intuitive understanding: instead of looking for the reality of things through language, she looks at them through “contact,” all of which brings to mind Buddhist poet Basho’s advice: “To learn of the pine, go to the pine. To learn of bamboo, go to bamboo.”<sup>159</sup> Language has simply become an

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<sup>154</sup> Amorós, Andrés ‘*Rayuela nueva lectura*’, p.146.

<sup>155</sup> “la escena del puente o tablón, ya nos reintroduce en una dimensión otra, aunque lo haga siempre a través del concreto vivir” Julio Cortázar and Ana María Barrenechea *Cuaderno de bitácora de Rayuela*, p.95.

<sup>156</sup> From the *Bitacora*:

“*Horacio*:

Buscar un centro hic et nunc significa contemporizar.

Solo excentrando aquí, se podrá alcanzar un centro, una

Armonía. Pero a costa de la ruptura total con la “realidad”

¿Cómo superar esa ruptura, seguir vivo?

- 1) Negando realidad a la “realidad” (Vedanta)
- 2) Apagándola, crepuscularizándola, nadándola.
- 3) Volviéndose loco.  
Pero volverse loco no es posible por la mera voluntad
- 4) Accediendo gracias a un *Satori*, una iluminación  
Tampoco es posible por la mera voluntad (por lo menos en el caso de Oliveira)”

Julio Cortázar and Ana María Barrenechea, *Cuaderno de bitácora de Rayuela*, p.57.

<sup>156</sup> Julio Cortázar and Ana María Barrenechea, *Cuaderno de bitácora de Rayuela*, p.57.

<sup>157</sup> Watts, Alan W. *The Way of Zen*, p.92.

<sup>158</sup> This relates to what is referred to in Zen Buddhism as “direct pointing.”

<sup>159</sup> Paraphrase of a well-known and oft-translated quote. An example can be found at Roadrunner May 2009 IX :2 <http://www.roadrunnerjournal.net/pages92/essay92.htm> (last consulted June 14, 2014).

obstacle.<sup>160</sup> Speaking in the novel of la Maga, we read: “Cierra los ojos y da en el blanco”, pensaba Oliveira. “Exactamente el sistema Zen de tirar al arco. Pero da en el blanco simplemente porque no sabe que ése es el sistema. Yo en cambio...”<sup>161</sup>

Boldy illustrates this mistrust of language so present in Cortázar’s work:

There is an intuitive, visceral certainty that something is very wrong in the world, but at the same time there is a refusal or inability to define what is wrong, because of the suspicion that it might be the very system of articulated thought which would allow that definition that is itself wrong<sup>162</sup>

That is why Oliveira says: “Lo que yo quisiera decir es justamente indecible (...) sin palabras llegar a la palabra (...) sin conciencia razonante, aprehender una unidad profunda”.<sup>163</sup> Cortázar criticizes Western culture and the notions of logic and reason inherited from the Greeks for gradually replacing “las cosas por sus nombres, la realidad por una idea de realidad”<sup>164</sup>. Citing Ernst Cassirer, this inheritance has led to scientific developments that are no more than “vanidosas fabricaciones de la mente, que no expresan la naturaleza de las cosas, sino la naturaleza de la mente.”<sup>165</sup> That is why Cortázar is so preoccupied in *Rayuela* with the search for “esa reconciliación con un mundo que nos ha separado y nos separa un aberrante dualismo de raíz occidental, y que el Oriente anula en sistemas y expresiones que sólo de lejos y deformadamente nos alcanzan”<sup>166</sup>

In keeping with Cortázar’s wordplay regarding the neologism “lo(gi)ca,”<sup>167</sup> and bearing in mind this section’s focus on logic and madness, I would venture to call this Western inheritance of logic a *straitjacket*. So when logical means are not considered sufficient we must turn to non-logical means to free us, although these alternative methods of interacting with the world may be considered insane and lead to the people who expound them being committed to insane asylums, much like the one in the novel.

When discussing the climatic scene in the insane asylum, Cortázar comments: “I

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<sup>160</sup> “Por qué te vas a poner anteojos si no los necesitás?”, responde Oliveira a su deseo de entender la dialéctica del club” Amestoy, Lida Aronne *Cortázar La Novela Mandala*, (Argentina: Fernando García Cambeiro, 1972) p.67.

<sup>161</sup> Amorós, Andrés ‘*Rayuela nueva lectura*’, p.145.

<sup>162</sup> Boldy, Steven *The novels of Julio Cortázar*, p.31.

<sup>163</sup> Amestoy, Lida Aronne *Cortázar: La Novela Mandala*, p.36.

<sup>164</sup> Alazraki, Jaime *En busca del unicornio*, p.44.

<sup>165</sup> Alazraki, Jaime *En busca del unicornio*, p.53.

<sup>166</sup> Alazraki, Jaime *En busca del unicornio*, p.107.

<sup>167</sup> logica/loca

think it was an attempt to show from a western point of view, with all the concomitant limitations and impossibilities, a jump into the absolute like that of a Zen monk or the Vedanta master.”<sup>1</sup> Thus:

The jump into the courtyard is not a falling into the awful nothingness of Western existentialism, but an abandoning oneself to the 'marvelous void' of Buddhism. The object of Zen is to destroy the distance between the subject and his experience that reality can be seen in its 'suchness'.<sup>1</sup>

In *La vuelta al día en ochenta mundos*, Cortázar discusses the “crazy” painter Adolfo Wölfli. When a doctor, interested in Wölfli’s paintings, asks him what it represents, he responds: “ ‘Esto’, y tomando su rollo de papel soplabla una melodía que para él no sólo era la explicación de la pintura sino también la pintura”<sup>168</sup> This clearly reflects the kind of response one would expect from a Zen master, who attempts to break through language and logic, to the true essence of “things as they are,” undivided by language, or the judgment of a “rational” perception.<sup>169</sup> It is also worth noting the comment that follows the action of Wölfli: “Si quisiera escribir sobre cosas así, el mundo me trataría de loco”.<sup>170</sup>

The whole notion, then, of Oliveira as “insane” is put into question, and one begins to doubt if he is simply more in touch with a “truer” reality not obscured by logic (a logic, let it be said, falsely created by language).

Cortázar clearly wishes to draw attention to the idea of insanity in relation to alternative ways of viewing the world. One pertinent example is through his manipulation of language, for example in the neologism “lóg(i)ca,” where he uses brackets to show the “holes” in language through which we can escape into other interpretations: “los pasajes donde la lóg(i)ca acababa ahorcándose con los cordones de las zapatillas”. We can also see the very relative nature of Oliveira’s madness, and propose a reading that when Oliveira appears to be at his most mad he is in fact at his most lucid:

una lectura atenta de los últimos capítulos de *Rayuela* descubre la trampa. El dialogo de Oliveira mantiene la coherencia y el tono habituales. Los que han variado su trato hacia él son los otros. Oliveira no actúa como un loco; son los demás quienes lo trataron como tal. Es un fenómeno que no debiera sorprendernos. A quienes

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<sup>168</sup> Cortázar, Julio *La casilla de los Morelli* (Tusquets, Barcelona, 1973) p.80.

<sup>169</sup> ‘La cuestión de la unidad lo preocupaba por lo fácil que le parecía caer en las peores trampas (...) una supuesta unidad de la persona que no pasaba de una unidad lingüística (...) Y así el deber, lo moral, lo inmoral y lo amoral, la justicia, la caridad, lo europeo y lo americano.’ Julio Cortázar *Rayuela*, p.215.

<sup>170</sup> (Citing Lichtenberg) Cortázar, Julio *La casilla de los Morelli* p.80.



persistimos en la suedoconciencia, atado a los tabúes gastados de la Gran Costumbre, un individuo lucido debe por fuerza impresionarnos como un “loco”.<sup>171</sup>

In fact, early on in the *Bitacora* it is stated that Oliveira “se hace el loco” (that is to say he simply *pretends* to be crazy), and that his motive for doing this is to unite Traveler and Talita (“que su locura sea un suterfugio para salvar a la pareja amiga”). This is then confirmed by the statement that Oliveira is not “de los que se tiran”.<sup>172</sup>

We see how other figures in the novel are related to this “locura”, this alternative way of viewing the world, which prevails in children, madmen, and women.<sup>173</sup> Notably we find how what is perceived as insanity is ultimately the key to Oliveira’s illumination.<sup>174</sup> He therefore becomes an “Oliveira-shaman”,<sup>175</sup> who is driven by mystical urges and uses Zen-like tactics to save others and thus consolidate his desire to become something akin to a Bodhisattva.<sup>176</sup> This idea of “con-fusion” with the world is elucidated by the following comment from Cortázar:

La conducta lógica del hombre tiende siempre a defender la persona del sujeto, a parapetarse frente a la irrupción osmótica de la realidad, ser por excelencia el antagonista del mundo, porque si al hombre lo obsesiona conocer es siempre un poco por hostilidad, por temor a *confundirse*. En cambio el poeta renuncia defenderse<sup>177</sup>

#### 4.3. LOS OTROS

“alcanzar el limite entre lo que se conoce y lo Otro porque hay un principio de *transcendencia*”—Cortázar, in discussing the role of a writer.

Oliveira only truly achieves his illumination in conjunction with other people (*los otros*), and that in fact we could interpret some of his actions—mainly those that occur after he has been exposed to *lo Otro*—as didactic and directed at illuminating those around him. In this way Oliveira becomes to Traveler and Talita what Morelli,

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<sup>171</sup> Amestoy, Lida Aronne Cortázar *La Novela Mandala*, p.92.

<sup>172</sup> Julio Cortázar, *Cuaderno de bitácora de Rayuela*, pp. 61-63.

<sup>173</sup> “Según el texto solo los candorosos - Maga, niños, locos - instalados de por sí en la plenitud inocente (...) tienen acceso a la zona sagrada, al kibbutz de deseo” Yurkievich, Saul ‘*Eros ludens: juego, amor, humor según Rayuela*’, p. 255.

<sup>174</sup> “In *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze and Guattari link schizophrenia with journey. Foucault, with his “*Stultifera Navis*,” talks about the madman as an interstitial being, a traveller of literal and metaphorical navigations (...) Yurkievich points out that “Oliveira practices interstitial vision” in his constant literal and metaphoric trips”. Chatzivasileiou, Litsa, ‘*Rereading Rayuela: Hypergraphy, Hermaphrodism, and Schizophrenia*,’ p. 409.

<sup>175</sup> Julio Cortázar and Ana María Barrenechea, *Cuaderno de bitácora de Rayuela*, p.61.

<sup>176</sup> The meaning of the term Bodhistatva is dealt with very briefly in the following section.

<sup>177</sup> Alazraki, Jaime *En busca del unicornio*, p.108.

la Maga, Emmanuèle and Trèpat were to him—a kind of Zen master, teaching through non-verbal means. In the *Bitacora*, we read: “No me puedo salvar solo (...) sin que se salven los otros”<sup>178</sup> This quote relates closely to a concept in Buddhism known as “bodhisattva” (Buddha) whose essential task is to illuminate everyone else before leaving the world. That is why Traveler and Talita play such a fundamental role in the novel: “even if Oliveira does reach some sort of centre in Paris, perhaps with Emmanuèle, it is meaningless until it is communicated to others, i.e. Traveler and Talita.”<sup>179</sup> Relating this to the symbols of the rayuela, and the bridge, that feature so heavily in the interactions between Oliveira-Talita-Traveler, we find the following interpretation:

The (bridge) scene affords a good example of Cortázar's syncretist technique. The bridge is ultimately Zoroastrian, and generally known as the bridge of the separator. Its use by Nietzsche in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* may also have affected Cortázar's choice. In Zoroastrianism it is the bridge between two worlds, allowing the soul to pass into Paradise, whereas underneath it lies Hell (...) from Traveler's side the plank is certainly wide and heavy; but Horacio's is shorter and wider, thus signifying his easier approximation to the spiritual.<sup>180</sup>

The necessity of the Others is key to understanding the social ramifications of Cortázar's world. “The area of the fantastic (the repressed), *lo otro*, is *consciously and intentionally* visited by a character dissatisfied with his primary reality”. The characters in Cortázar's works then obtain access to an “other” reality when a “pattern of exposing oneself to *lo otro* is created by a character more or less unwittingly entering a concert or spectacle and coming into contact with what he (usually due to its unexpected nature, or contrast with his own medium) considers monstrous or absurd.”<sup>181</sup>

In relation to Cortázar's dissection of East and West, Amestoy points out that the author's techniques work “mediante una autoalienación a la manera yogi pero tambien a través de un íntegro compromiso con la vida y con la fraternidad humana al modo cristiano.”<sup>182</sup> With should keep this in mind when we consider the scene with Trèpat, where, motivated by pity, he attempts to help her but “en vez de ir llevando a

<sup>178</sup> Julio Cortázar and Ana María Barrenechea, *Cuaderno de bitácora de Rayuela* p.59.

<sup>179</sup> Steven Boldy, *The novels of Julio Cortázar* p.45. (See also page 618 of *Rayuela*: “mi salvación (...) tiene que ser también la salvación de todos”.)

<sup>180</sup> Davies, Gareth A. ‘Mondrian, Abstract Art, and Theosophy in Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela*’, p.138-139.

<sup>181</sup> Steven Boldy, *The novels of Julio Cortázar* p.42.

<sup>182</sup> Amestoy, Lida Aronne ‘La búsqueda del “yo” al “nosotros”: Génesis y definición del tema del perseguidor en Cortázar.’ Alazraki, Jaime (ed) *Julio Cortázar: La isla final*, p.378.

alguien del brazo, hablándole con lástima, era a él que lo llevaban (...) Esa mujer jugadora de rayuela le tenía tanta lastima”<sup>183</sup>

Relating the novels *Los premios* and *Rayuela*, Boldy underlines “the insistence on communication, on the necessarily collective nature of any salvation,” and goes on to add that “(t)his corresponds to the importance of the reader for Morelli: ‘I wonder if I will ever get it across that the only real character I am interested in is the reader’”

#### 4.4. Morelli and the contra-novela

*Morelli es más: es el autor mítico o el autor como mito de una literatura que a veces logra transparentar - en el doblaje de autocuestionamiento - su razón lúdica y crítica, su ficción que interroga.*<sup>184</sup>

Morelli, like many of the protagonists of *Rayuela*, is a foreigner. He is an *outsider* both in geographical terms and also in terms of his writing, which challenges many traditional narrative concepts. Morelli, often viewed as another one of Cortázar’s alter-egos, typifies the search for a narrative that goes beyond being merely the contents of a “book,” that is, beyond a simple artefact that merely encapsulates, and thereby perpetuates in a closed form, a closed interpretation of reality. Morelli categorically states: “el verdadero y único personaje que me interesa es el lector, en la medida en que algo de lo que escribo debería contribuir a mutarlo, a desplazarlo, a extrañarlo, a enajenarlo”.<sup>185</sup>

Morelli could easily be seen as some kind of Zen master, and his work and philosophy a path through which illumination can be sought. In the terms of narrative character, Morelli fulfills the role of the spirit guide who gives our hero the metaphorical “key” to help him achieve the necessary understanding required to complete his journey. Of course in *Rayuela* this is made explicit in the literal key he gives Oliveira, so that he can gain access to his writings, and thereby use those writings to unlock a more profound understanding of the world (this explicit *pointing* to the game being played, by Cortázar the author, could be interpreted as a playful wink in the reader’s direction). Morelli’s writings, then, maintain a dialogue with the

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<sup>183</sup> Julio Cortázar and Ana María Barrenechea, *Cuaderno de bitácora de Rayuela*, p.88.

<sup>184</sup> Cortázar, Julio *La casilla de los Morelli* p. 8.

<sup>185</sup> Amorós, Andrés ‘*Rayuela nueva lectura*’, p.137.

novel that contains them. And Morelli's preoccupations mirror those of Oliveira-Cortázar: he is looking for a "lenguaje adánico", a language that will restore "el nombre del día".<sup>186</sup> This requires the rejection of the so-called *objective* novel. Morelli wants to "modificar no al hombre abstracto, sino al lector concreto."<sup>187</sup> These elements all relate to the open-ended nature of *Rayuela*. To quote Morelli:

Como todas las criaturas de elección del Occidente, la novela se contenta con un orden cerrado. Resueltamente en contra, buscar también aquí la apertura y para eso cortar de raíz toda construcción sistemática de caracteres y situaciones."<sup>188</sup>

In many ways this alternate way of seeing the world and manifesting it in a work of art that allows multiple readings has its correspondence in scientific development: "Para Umberto Eco, la obra "abierta" sería algo así como una (...) imagen discontinua e indeterminada de la realidad que hoy nos propone la ciencia contemporánea."<sup>189</sup> Cortázar makes this correlation between modern science and his narrative concerns explicit in *Rayuela*:

Basta mirar un momento como los ojos de todos los días el comportamiento de un gato (...) para sentir que esa nueva visión a que tiende la ciencia, esa desantropomorfización que proponen urgentemente los biólogos y los físicos (...) no es otra cosa que la remota, aislada, insistente voz con que ciertas líneas de budismo, del vedanta, del sufismo, de la mística oriental, nos instan a renunciar de una vez por todas a la mortalidad.<sup>190</sup>

Both Morelli and *Rayuela* (*Rayuela* being essentially "la teoría literaria del autor, hecha ya práctica en la novela"<sup>191</sup>) respond through artistic means to the question that arises as a result of challenging the failings of language and "logical" thought: "¿Para qué sirve un escritor si no para destruir la literatura?"<sup>192</sup> Cortázar spoke of what he called the "escritor adelantado," stating that the *forward-thinking* writer's task is to "alcanzar el límite entre lo sabido y lo otro, porque en eso hay ya un comienzo de trascendencia".<sup>193</sup>

Amestoy makes use of a quotation from the writings of Gurdjieff, as cited by Lous Pauwels, that almost reads like a Morelli mission statement:

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<sup>186</sup> Cortázar, Julio *La casilla de los Morelli*, p.9.

<sup>187</sup> Cortázar, Julio *La casilla de los Morelli*, p.13.

<sup>188</sup> Amorós, Andrés 'Rayuela nueva lectura', p.140.

<sup>189</sup> Alazraki, Jaime (ed) *En busca del unicornio*, p.63.

<sup>190</sup> Alazraki, Jaime *En busca del unicornio*, p.106.

<sup>191</sup> Amorós, Andrés 'Rayuela nueva lectura', p.106.

<sup>192</sup> Amestoy, Lida Aronne *Cortázar: La Novela Mandala*, p.503.

<sup>193</sup> Cortázar, Julio *La casilla de los Morelli* p.122.

no puedo escribir "La marquesa tomó el té a las cinco". No hay tal marquesa, hay una danza de todas las marquesas posibles (...) Toda empresa literaria sería es una tentativa de expresar el TODO del hombre (...) comenzar por una negativa categórica de presentar a los yo sucesivos y a este otro yo, igualmente ilusorio, del escritor escribiendo, como si fuera participantes del ser real. Sabíamos ya entonces que no nos quedaban más que dos formas de seguir siendo escritores. Primera forma: he adquirido conciencia de este mecanismo, de mi poco de existencia. no escribo sino para afirmar que no estoy engañando y para invitar a los demás a que también adquieran, a sus vez, esta conciencia (...) Soñábamos con llegar a la segunda forma de ser escritor (...) se trata de rechazar el movimiento natural de la vida (...) se trata de *resistir* (...) lo que efectúo en la rebelión contra la no-existencia de mí mismo y de todas las cosas al rededor de mí, terminará por dar a mi lenguaje un valor creador que no podrá tener el lenguaje humano común, el lenguaje de la sumisión, el lenguaje de la ausencia aceptada.<sup>194</sup>

By revealing the tool itself of fiction we are able to take the questions posed therein further (más allá), and not limit them to problems of a "story." Nietzsche posed the problem in philosophical terms with his affirmation that "todo nuestro llamado conocimiento es un comentario más o menos fantástico de un texto desconocido, tal vez inconocible y sin embargo presentido".<sup>195</sup>

Many have criticised the *capítulos prescindibles* as a novelty that shows a lack of restraint on the author's behalf, and have viewed them as the bits that a more conscientious author would have ultimately cut. Cortázar justified their inclusion by stating:

Es sabido que toda atención funciona como un pararrayos. Basta concentrarse en un determinado terreno para que frecuentes analogías acudan (...) eso que se da en llamar coincidencias (...) En los años de *Rayuela* la saturación llegó a tal punto que lo único honrado era aceptar sin discusión esa lluvia de meteoritos que entraban por ventanas de calles, libros, diálogos, azares cotidianos, y convertirlos en pasajes,

<sup>194</sup> Amestoy, Lida Aronne *Cortázar: La Novela Mandala*, p.38.

Regarding notions of self, Talita is a key figure. Let us look briefly at Talita's recorded monologue: "Soy yo, soy él. Somos, pero soy yo, primeramente soy yo, defenderé ser yo hasta que no pueda más. Atalía soy yo. Ego. Yo. Diplomada, argentina, una uña encarnada, bonita de a ratos, grandes ojos oscuros, yo. Atalía Donosí, yo. Yo. Yo-yo."

This monologue is interpreted thus by Yovanovich: "We see in her monologue that in her existential search Talita is a logical being who is also versed in modern psychology as she refers to the three dimensions of a being: id, ego and superego. However she supercedes logic and modern science; she realizes that "yo" by itself is nothing more than a "yo-yo." The identity, according to her, is not to be found in her self alone but in her union with others, where she is an active and independent piece of a larger whole." Yovanovich, Gordana. 1990. 'The Role of Women in Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela*', p. 544.

<sup>195</sup> Alazraki, Jaime *En busca del unicornio*, p.106.

Citing Julio Cortázar and Ana María Barrenechea, *Cuaderno de bitácora de Rayuela*, page 101. We could add: "El mundo visible y la existencia personal piden ser interpretados como signo de otra cosa. Pero (...) se han perdido las claves que permitirían de un código a otro".

fragmentos, capítulos prescindibles o imprescindibles<sup>196</sup>

We see in this way how Cortázar, as a writer, was responding to the arguments posed in his novel regarding a surrender to intuition, above and beyond a more traditional adherence to an outdated concept of logic.

It is also worth noting the defense of the inclusion of so many cultural and artistic references:

Oliveira “usa” vitalmente la cultura pero también se defiende contra ella: “Si algo había elegido desde joven era no defenderse mediante la rápida y ansiosa acumulación de una “cultura”, truco por excelencia de la clase media argentina para hurtar el cuerpo a la realidad nacional y a cualquier otra, y creerse a salvo del vacío que la rodeaba” (...) No hay en Cortázar—salvo en algún caso y por ironía—exhibicionismo cultural. Lo que ocurre es que el jazz, la pintura de Modrian o la poesía de Rimbaud forman parte de la realidad de Oliveira tanto como los gruñidos de su portera o la niebla junto al Sena. La cultura no es un adorno, sino un elemento más (...) de su experiencia vital<sup>197</sup>

To exclude these cultural references for purely narrative or aesthetic principles would have been to falsify the totality of the character and his world, as Cortázar envisioned it.

*Rayuela* is an attempt, then, at a “total” novel—question and answer at the same time. In the *Bitacora* we can see that “La obra que se planea quiere no sólo incluir discursivamente una estética de ruptura y de la inversión, sino que además quiere ser la metáfora de esa praxis bajo una fábula que la re-presente (...) la escritura misma traducía su estética revolucionaria en el lenguaje, en la estructura, en la función del lector.” One of the most revealing surprises to be found in the *Bitacora* is that Cortázar was considering citing works that would require the reader to physically move from one place to another in order to read, and complete, the work.<sup>198</sup> In addition to that idea, that in the end was not used in the final product, was an ending with the instruction: “Pasa a usted,” that would thereby oblige the readers to literally *complete* the novel themselves.<sup>199</sup>

In conclusion we can see that *Rayuela* is an attempt to *incite* us—to make us take the journey for ourselves. *Rayuela* then is a tool—a game, if you will—and the active readers should play it: to simply read it passively would mean that we would most

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<sup>196</sup> Cortázar, Julio *La casilla de los Morelli* p.117.

<sup>197</sup> Amorós, Andrés ‘*Rayuela nueva lectura*’, p.134.

<sup>198</sup> Cuaderno 51, cited by Ana Maria Barrenechea in ‘*Genesis y circunstancias*,’ in *Rayuela, edicion critica*. p.566.

<sup>199</sup> Julio Cortázar and Ana María Barrenechea, *Cuaderno de bitácora de Rayuela*, p.111.

likely never reach the illumination spoken of in its pages. To paraphrase Basho's advice: *Do not take the path that the ones before you took. Seek what they sought.*

It is not enough to passively read *Rayuela*, all of us simply turning the same pages the same way.

We must play it!

## 5. CONCLUSION

While I have delineated the dissertation into three main sections with differing preoccupations, I feel that are all inextricably interwoven (as can be seen from the material included herein). One way of linking them would be through the myth of Eden, whereby we see that there is a world—a symbolic city, or even an island—that exists previous to our current “knowledge” and perception; a world that has been lost, and that relates in many ways to the division of man from his “natural” world. Therefore, women (insofar as they are symbolically represented in the novel, and conforming to stereotypes though it be) offer a potential reconciliation, and an intuitive path back to this Eden, or “*Nirvana*.”

In broad terms we must examine the way in which the world is viewed, in order to examine how this affects the way in which we live and interact with others, and the consequences of all this on the construction of identities. Through Cortázar’s work we can study these concerns, entering a less scientific and less logical realm—a realm that is rich in myth and symbolic aspects—whereby we can draw conclusions (or, at the very least, discover pertinent questions) regarding the far-reaching influences of the differing modes of thought, and specifically the language used to represent them, that we have inherited from our foremothers and forefathers. One of Cortázar’s principal tools for the unravelling of our cosmovision is his constant mistrust of language and his attempt to renovate it. Also he puts into question the realism offered by more traditional narratives:

el lenguaje más cargadamente realista es una forma de representación o ideación de la realidad y no su presentación, y que aun esos símbolos que la representan son abstracciones arbitrarias de las cosas pero no las cosas, como el espacio geométrico



no es el espacio físico.<sup>200</sup>

Adding to Cortázar's lyrical invention is his knowledge and use of myth. He has mined the rich depths of myth throughout his work, and it would seem that this territory still has a lot to offer us—especially in terms of what it offers to us in terms of revealing our subconscious. Jung once stated that Freud: “da expresión al hecho de que el hombre occidental se halla en peligro de perder su sombra, de identificarse con su personalidad ficticia y de identificar al mundo con su abstracto retrato pintado por el racionalismo científico”.<sup>201</sup>

It is perhaps this element, this questioning of the world, that made the book upon its publication so popular among younger readers, readers who were still defining the world around them, and desirous of the possibility of alternative visions of the world that contrasted with the homogenous one offered to them by *La Gran Costumbre*.

The persistence of a so-called “Gran Costumbre,” that formulates our perception of the world, is the reason why *Rayuela* continues to offer to modern readers a wealth of material for the questioning of identity.

*Admitamos lo que todos los idealistas admiten: la naturaleza alucinante del mundo.*

*Hagamos lo que ningún idealista ha hecho:*

*busquemos irrealidades que confirmen dicha naturaleza.*<sup>202</sup>

**Pasa a usted...**

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<sup>200</sup> Alazraki, Jaime (ed) *En busca del unicornio*, p.117.

<sup>201</sup> Alazraki, Jaime (ed) *Julio Cortázar: La isla final*, p.34

<sup>202</sup> Alazraki, Jaime (ed) *Julio Cortázar: La isla final*, p.23.

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*Paf se acabó*